

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

PRESIDENT JOHN TAYLOR,

In the 14th Ward Meeting House,
Sunday evening, Dec. 7, 1879.

REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

WE meet together from time to time to speak, to hear, to reflect, to converse, and to exchange views in regard to the worship of Almighty God. There is something associated with these matters that has generally attracted the attention of the human family in all ages, among all peoples, and under almost all circumstances. There is and always has been a feeling of reverence existing among the human family for a Divine Being of some kind and of some form, even amongst the most low and debased people of the earth. The position that we occupy in the world, our ideas of the mutability of affairs of time and sense, the continuous departure of one after another from this stage of existence to another, leads us, as well as other portions of the human family generally more or less to reflect upon those things pertaining to the future. Various ideas and theories have existed amongst different peoples. Some have worshiped a great variety of Gods of their own making, while others have followed the notions and theories of men in regard to certain doctrines formulas theories and ideas that have been promulgated among what would be termed the wise, the prudent, and the intelligent of the earth. But in relation to religious matters there is no one can have any true or correct conception of a hereafter unless it has been revealed by the Almighty, who alone is able to comprehend the end from the beginning and is acquainted with the position and destinies of men and of the world.

We have had revealed to us from time to time, as manifested in the scriptures, developed therein, many ideas pertaining to God and to futurity; but any intelligence in regard to these matters was generally obtained directly from the Lord, or through the ministering of angels, or by the spirit of prophecy and revelation given to them by the Almighty. And it is emphatically stated in the Scriptures that "the things of God knoweth no man but by the Spirit of God," and hence when men assume to comprehend principles pertaining to futurity, predicated upon the learning, the wisdom, the intelligence or the science of the world, they are always very much at fault. Who can comprehend the Almighty or understand his designs? As one of old said, "It is high as heaven." What canst thou know? "Deeper than hell." Who can penetrate its mysteries? What really do we know? To commence with, who can understand the designs of God in relation to the organization of this world, or in relation to the position of man and his destiny? His past operations, his present dealings with the nations and his designs in the future? To the uninspired, are all a profound enigma. Who knows anything about it? We find all kinds of theories, notions and opinions in existence at the present day, but what do they amount to? What would my unsupported opinion be worth, or what would anybody's opinion be in relation to these matters? It would amount to nothing. In regard to other principles, of a more material nature that we are intimately associated with, there are certain facts that scientists and men of intelligence always wish to be demonstrated; and unless they are, they pay very little attention to any unsupported hypothesis. If this be true in regard to the known sciences, how much more particular should we be in regard to more important matters. Theories, hypotheses, notions, dogmas and opinions amount to very little when associated with the great and eternal principles connected with the welfare of mankind, and the salvation of a world. And hence we need something higher, something of more intelligence than anything that man possesses to give unto us information pertaining to these matters.

When God created the world and placed man upon it he had certain ideas and designs that were fixed, immutable and eternal, they were based or predicated, in the most consummate wisdom; the most profound intelligence; the wisdom and intelligence, if you please, that dwells with the gods. The organization of the heavens and the earth, the creation of the world as we understand

it, and also the creation of man and beast, fowl, fish and insect, and everything that exists upon the face of this earth. There was an object and design in relation to all these matters. We could know nothing about that, however, unless it had been revealed unto us, unless it had been communicated by the being who knows the end from the beginning, and who comprehends all things pertaining to the present condition as well as the past and the future destiny of the human family and of the world.

Certain men in different ages have told us, so it is recorded here in the Bible, about certain communications which they had from the Almighty. They seemed to have a mode and manner of approaching him and obtaining truth and intelligence from him, and he in the various dispensations made choice of and selected individuals through whom and to whom he communicated his will to the human family. There is something very remarkable in regard to these things. There are many remarkable things in the old antediluvian history of the world, that we have only very imperfectly related to us in the Bible. We read, for instance, of a man by the name of Enoch—we are told in the Bible that "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." That is about all that is said about him except that he was a man that feared God. But Enoch, when we come to know more of his history from the revelations that have been given, we find, was a man that had communication with God from time to time. The Bible says he walked with God and was not, for God took him, but in other revelations which we have received, we have an account of the kind of ministry that he had, the labors that he performed, the preaching that he did, the manifestation of the power of God on his behalf, and finally of his gathering together a large number of people. That he built a city; that in that city they were under the guidance, direction and control of the Almighty; and that he and his city and people, or many of them, were translated, and hence as the Bible says, "he was not for God took him," and he also took the people that were with him, those that feared him and worked righteousness.

There are other events associated with these matters which are very interesting when we come to examine them. The people had corrupted themselves very much, departed from the laws of God, violated his ordinances, and committed all kinds of iniquity, so that, as the Bible tells us all the thoughts of their hearts were only evil and that continually, and it repented the Lord that he had made man because of the wickedness and corruption that then existed. We have a very short account of this in the Scriptures, but through other means that have been communicated to us we have received a further knowledge of these matters; for other men that embraced the Gospel in former ages became preachers of righteousness as well as Enoch. They had the Spirit of the Gospel as Moses had it, as Jesus had it, and as we have it. They held communion with God and were under the inspiration of the Almighty, in their administration; and when they came together—those that feared God and worked righteousness—they had visions and revelations and prophesied of events that should transpire. There were many prophets in those days and they prophesied of a prison house that God had prepared, told the people of the destruction that was coming upon the earth: that they should be swept off the face of the earth by the waters of the flood and that none should be spared except a few to perpetuate the name and fame of the Almighty and again propagate their species. This is a thing that has seemed very singular to some men who do not comprehend the designs of God, and they suppose that there was a degree of cruelty attached to the Almighty in sweeping off the whole people of the land, with the exception of a very few. They assume to say there was a degree of injustice, cruelty and tyranny associated with it. However, that is for want of an understanding of correct principle, and the designs of the Almighty, and many conclusions that people arrive at, predicated upon the same ground—arise from a lack of understanding the principle that they talk about.

There are some principles connected with these things which put matters in a very difficult light.

When we understand the nature of man, when we consider that he is a dual being, that he is possessed of a body and spirit, that he is associated with time and with eternity, that according to the Scriptures the spirits of all men were created before this world was made, and that God is the God and Father of the spirits of all flesh; and being the God and Father of the spirits of all flesh, it was his right and his prerogative to dictate what should be done for the benefit of those spirits and his children that he had created here upon the earth. It was not a matter of theory, according to the opinions of men, but an immutable plan, according to the eternal wisdom of God as it existed in his bosom before the world was, or "before the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy." These spirits that he was the father of had their rights and privileges and immunities; and as he had created man upon the earth or prepared a tabernacle or a body, if you please, for these spirits to inhabit, it became his interest, as the father of the human family, to look after their welfare. They had been led aside by the influence of Satan and had corrupted themselves and departed from correct principles, and violated the law of God, and became degraded and sunken in iniquity and infamy. Now, suppose we take ourselves back into the presence of our Father, and looking down upon these degraded wretches that inhabited the earth at that time, would we not turn to our Father as a just God and say, "Father, do you see the corruption, the degradation, the infamy and the evil that exists and permeates the world of mankind?" "Yes, yes," says he, "of course I see it." "Is it just that our spirits should be condemned to go and inhabit the bodies of these men, or of their seed, that are so fallen, so degraded and so corrupt, and whose actions and operations are so at variance with thee and thy laws? Is it just and equitable that we should go and be mixed up with these infamies and be led astray like them into the paths of vice and suffer for things that we have not done and could not help ourselves in: is it just?" "Why, no it is not, and I will cut them off; and as they possess the power of propagating their species upon the earth, I will stop that power by a flood and raise up another people, that justice may be done you, my sons and daughters, and that the judge of all the earth may do right." When we look at things in that point of view, it places them in another position from what they would appear otherwise, and justifies the ways of God with man.

Now, when this event took place, people were cast into the pit, into the prisons, as it had before been said that they should be. Well, what about that? Trace things forward to the time that Jesus appears upon the earth and we see something then pertaining to these very individuals, in the acts of the Almighty, as they transpired at that time. When Jesus accomplished his work, when he had fulfilled the mission that he had to do here upon the earth, and when he was put to death in the flesh and quickened by the spirit, he went and preached to those spirits in prison "that some time were disobedient when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah;" and although they had suffered the wrath of Almighty God, he who had come to proclaim deliverance to the captive, to open the prison doors to those that were bound, to release them and to proclaim the acceptable time of the Lord, he went to them as their Savior, in common with others, and preached the gospel unto them. Hence we find the acts of God justified in relation to these matters, and while he had power to destroy, while he had power to send them to prison, he also had power to conceive a plan for their deliverance therefrom, when the time should come that they should be delivered after they had suffered sufficiently for the crimes, evils and iniquities that they had committed upon the earth. There are many singular things associated with these matters that men do not really comprehend.

We come again to another prominent character, that is Abraham, a very remarkable man in his day and age; although at the present time men look upon him as a kind of an old shepherd, a man that attended flocks and herds and sheep, a sort of herdsman and a shepherd; and there was very little of him anyhow except that he lived in his day almost as a barbarian. That is the opinion that many men have formed

of him—that he was something like our backwoodsmen, some of our farmers who have not mixed up with the elite of society, or made themselves familiar with the intelligence that pervades the world. I look upon him as another character entirely, and from information that we can gather from revelations that have been referred to, we find that there was something very peculiar about him. We read his history and we find that he was a man that sought after righteousness, that he desired to obtain more righteousness, that he examined the records of his fathers, that he found in examining the records, tracing them back through the flood, clear away back unto Adam's day, he found many circumstances that were connected with mankind not only to Adam's day; but before the world was. In doing this among other things he found he had a right to the priesthood. I need not stop to tell you what that is, you Latter-day Saints. You understand it is the rule and government of God, whether in the heavens or on the earth, and when we talk of the kingdom of God we talk of something that pertains to rule, government, authority and dominion; and that priesthood is the ruling principle that exists in the heavens or on the earth associated with the affairs of God. Hence we are told in the Scriptures that Christ was a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec. Then of what order was Melchisedec? A priest for ever after the order of the Son of God, for if Christ was after the order of Melchisedec, Melchisedec must have been after the order of Christ, as a necessary consequence. Very well. Now, then, in relation to that priesthood it was something that ministers in time and through eternity; it was a principle that held the keys of the mysteries of the revelations of God, and was intimately associated with the gospel, and the gospel wherever it existed was in possession of this priesthood; and it could not exist without it. It always "brought life and immortality to light." The notions and opinions and religions of man generally are altogether devoid of a principle of that kind, they know nothing about it. Whenever men are placed in communication with God and are in possession of the gospel of the Son of God, it brings life and immortality to light, it places them in relationship with God that other men know nothing about.

They were spoken of in former times as the "sons of God." "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." It was this priesthood that would be the means of introducing him into the presence of God that Abraham found that he was a rightful inheritor of, according to his lineage and descent, and he applied for an ordination and he received this ordination, according to the revelation given unto us, and with that ordination the powers, the blessings, the light, intelligence and revelation associated with the Gospel of the Son of God. And what then? The next that we read of is that he had the Urim and Thummim, and thus he sought unto God for himself, and while searching unto him, God revealed himself unto Abraham and said: "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee, and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." There is something very remarkable about this when we reflect upon it, and when we examine the position that he occupied, and that his seed occupied, we can see the fulfillment of these things. And afterwards the Lord revealed himself to him from time to time, communicated his will to him, and he was made acquainted with the designs of the Almighty. The Lord showed unto him the order of the creation of this earth on which we stand, and revealed unto him some of the greatest and most sublime truths that ever were made known to man. He got these through revelation from God and through the medium of the Gospel of the Son of God.

Well, let us look a little at the fulfillment of some of these things. "I will bless them that bless thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." We read sometime after wards of Isaac and Jacob: Jacob had communication with God. The Lord appeared unto him from time to time, and revealed his purposes and designs unto him. Abraham, prophesied that the children of Israel should be in bondage in Egypt

for 400 years, that after that time they should be delivered; and Moses was raised up as a deliverer, and he conversed with God. He saw a bush that burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. He afterwards conversed with the Lord upon mount Sinai, and received tables of stone written upon by the finger of God, which were the commandments of the Lord to the children of Israel. And who was Moses? A descendant of Abraham.

We also read of prophets who by the spirit of inspiration could draw aside the dark veil of futurity and penetrate into the invisible world and contemplate the purposes of God as they should roll forth in after ages in all their majesty and power and glory. And who were they? They were the seed of Abraham. We read that Jesus, also, who was the Son of God, was born of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh. Who were his Apostles? The seed of Abraham. Then there was Nephi, Lehi, Ishmael and others that came from the land of Jerusalem to this continent according to the Book of Mormon. Who were they? The seed of Abraham. There were also the Twelve Apostles called and set apart upon this continent who went forth by the power and spirit of God, aided by intelligence and revelation such as they never had on the other continent. Who were they? The seed of Abraham. "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed;"—not cursed; that was not what the priesthood of God was introduced for, but to spread light, truth, and intelligence, to unfold unto mankind the ways, purposes and designs of God, to make man acquainted with his origin, his position in life and his future destiny; and to make him acquainted, as an eternal, intelligent being, with things past, with things present, and with things to come. This is what Jesus taught them on the continent of America. "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the comforter will not come unto you;" which is the spirit of God. And what shall it do? It shall bring things past to your remembrance. You shall be made acquainted with the actions and operations and doings of men and of God in ages that have preceded you. It shall lead unto all truth. You shall comprehend all matters that are necessary for you to know by the light, intelligence, and revelation which flows from God. And what else shall it do? It shall show you of things to come. It shall draw aside the veil of the invisible world. It shall make you acquainted with the things pertaining to eternity, and you will be enabled to square your lives according to the eternal principles of intelligence as it dwells in the bosom of God, and as the Holy Ghost will make known and reveal unto you. It is this priceless treasure that is spoken of that we possess in earthen vessels "that ye are came," says Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews, "unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the enumerable company of angels. To the general assembly of the first born which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." This is what the gospel does for you, it brings life and immortality to light.

These are some of the leading prominent principles as they have existed heretofore, along with thousands of others that we have not time to mention or touch upon this evening.

Now we will come to other events of later date; events with which we are associated—I refer now to the time that Joseph Smith came among men. What was his position? and how was he situated? I can tell you what he told me about it. He said that he was very ignorant of the ways, designs and purposes of God, and knew nothing about them; he was a youth unacquainted with religious matters or the systems and theories of the day. He went to the Lord, having read James' statement, that "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." He believed that statement and went to the Lord and asked him, and the Lord revealed himself to him together with his son Jesus, and pointing to the latter said: "This is my beloved son, hear him." He then asked in regard to the various religions with which he was surrounded. He inquired which of them was right, for he wanted to know the right way and to walk in it. He was told that none of them was right, that they had all departed from the right way, that they had forsaken God the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that could hold no water. Afterwards the angel Moroni came to him and revealed to him the Book of Mormon, the history of which you are generally familiar, and also with the statements that I am now making pertaining to these things. And then came Nephi, one of the ancient prophets, that had lived upon this continent, who had an interest in the welfare of the people that he had lived amongst in those days.

But how is it in relation to these people and in regard to some of these matters? Why and