

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

ELDER CHAS. W. PENROSE,

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REPORTED BY ARTHUR WINTER.

The personality of God—Vagueness of the common ideas of Deity—Who and what God is—The spirits of men the offspring of God—Spirit not immaterial—The trinity creed of Christendom—Man may become like God in His glory.

THE remarks which have been made to us this afternoon by Bishop Preston are of a practical nature and calculated to lead our minds to reflection upon our duties as Latter-day Saints.

The religion of God is a practical religion, and God is a real and practical being. It has been stated by one of our leading men that God is "a business God," and many remarks have been made concerning that expression by persons opposed to us, with the desire of turning it to ridicule. It has not been stated by any of our brethren that God is *only* a business God, but the remark was made with reference to some of His attributes and of His works. The people of the present day who profess to believe in God, generally speaking, have very little idea in regard to what He is. They consider that He is incomprehensible. Their ideas concerning Him are very vague, and the attempts which have been made to explain God to the children of men, by persons who claim to be teachers of religion and to have authority to speak in the name of the Lord, are of such a character that no one can understand them. The reason of this is because those persons who have attempted to make an explanation have not understood the subject themselves, and when a person does not understand a thing it is very difficult for him to try and make some body else understand it. Now, I do not pretend to say that there is any body living who fully and entirely comprehends God; but there are many people living who have some definite ideas concerning Him, concerning His attributes, concerning His ways, concerning His will; and what they understand they are at liberty to declare and to try and make other people understand, particularly if they are called upon by the Lord and authorized by Him so to do. People very frequently refer to that passage of Scripture which says: "God is a spirit," and as their notions concerning what spirit is, are not very clear, that passage of Scripture does not make very plain to their understanding what God is. People, generally speaking, have an idea that spirit is something intangible, something that cannot be comprehended, nor seen, nor handled; that it is far different in every respect from anything that is material; in fact, the philosophers and theologians call spirit "immaterial substance." Now, this is for want of knowing better. Men in these times, like men in former days, have tried to find out God and the things of God by human wisdom and learning, and they have failed: for "man by searching," the Scripture says, "cannot find out God." But God can manifest Himself to man, and if God chooses to make Himself manifest to His children they can measurably comprehend Him. But in their mortal state, in this state of probation in which we live, mankind cannot fully grasp Deity to comprehend Him as He is in His majesty, and might, and power and glory; but, as I said, they can measurably comprehend God when He manifests Himself to them, and they can understand Him to the extent that He manifests Himself to them.

According to the book called the Bible, God the Eternal Father has manifested Himself at different times to individuals living upon the face of this earth, and according to the testimony of the Latter-day Saints, God has manifested Himself in this age of the world in a similar way to men whom He called and appointed to act in His name; and from what we read of God's revelations in former days as well as in latter days, we learn that He is a person, an individual; that He is not a myth, not an imaginary being, but a reality, and that He is in the form and likeness of man, or in other words, that man is made in the image of God. In the opening book of the Bible, in very first chapter of that book, we read: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." God is a spirit; but it does not follow that because God is a spirit, He has no form, no shape, no extent, no limit; or that He can be, as an individual, in every place at the same time, as many people imagine. We are told that God dwells in heaven, and when Jesus Christ was upon the earth He always taught His disciples that their Father was in heaven. He said that as He came from the Father so He was going back to the Father. This individual, then, has a location, a place of residence. He occupies a certain position, He dwells in the heavens, and He made man in His image, in His likeness. Jesus, we are told, was in the "express image" of His Father's person. When He was upon the earth He came to represent His Father, and we are told concerning Him, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." And the Apostle Paul, who makes this declaration, advised

his brethren to have the same mind in them that was in Christ Jesus:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name:

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth:

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.—Phillip ii, v. 2.

Now Jesus, who was in the form of God, was only one of the sons of God. He called His disciples His brethren, and He impressed upon them the great fact that His Father was their Father, that His God was their God, that He was one of them. When He returned, or was about to return to the Father with His resurrected body, He told Mary to tell His disciples that He was going to ascend to His Father and their Father, to His God and their God.

In the Old Testament, which gives accounts of God's occasional manifestations of His presence to men upon the earth, we find that they all saw Him as a person, with the form of a man. Moses talked with Him face to face. Nadab and Abihu and seventy Elders of Israel, with Moses and Aaron went up in the mount.

And they saw the God of Israel, and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in His clearness; also upon the children of Israel He laid not His hand, also they saw God and did eat and drink.—(Exodus xxiv 10, 11.)

I might refer to a number of passages of Scripture in the Old Testament, showing that whenever God appeared to man, manifesting Himself to man, He appeared in the form of a man. We are told repeatedly in the Scriptures that the children of men are the sons of God. He is the Father and God of the spirits of all flesh. The spirit of man, which inhabits his body and which is the life of the body in addition to the blood—blood being the life of the flesh, but the spirit animating all—comes from God and is the offspring of God. Because of this we understand what is said in I John iii, 2:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet 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."

God, then, the God of the Bible, who is called Jehovah, the person who manifested Himself to Israel as Jehovah, is an individual, a personality, and He made man in His image and His likeness. Now, if we are the children of God, and if Jesus Christ is the Son of God, we can upon that reasoning understand something about what God is like, for there is an eternal principle in heaven and on earth, that every seed begets of its kind, every seed brings forth in its own likeness and character. The seed of an apple, when it is reproduced, brings forth an apple, and so with a pear, and so with a plum, and so with all the varieties of the vegetable kingdom. It is the same with all the varieties of the animal kingdom. The doctrine of evolution, as it is called, is true in some respects—that is, that species can be improved, exalted, made better, but it remains of the same species. The advancement is in the same line. It is unfoldment. We do not find any radical change from one species to another. It is an eternal principle that every seed produces its own kind, not another kind. And as we are the children of God we can follow out the idea and perceive what God our Father is, the Being who is the progenitor of our spiritual existence, the being from whom we have sprung. We being the seed of God, that Being is a personality, an individual, a being in some respects like us, or rather we are made in His image.

"Man also is spirit," we are told in the revelations of God to the Latter-day Saints. Man, the real man, is a spirit, an individual that dwells in a body, a spiritual person clothed upon with earth; a being who will live when the earth goes back to mother dust. Man's spirit, then, is an individual, a personality, and the spirit is in the likeness and shape of the body which it inhabits. When the spirit goes out of the body there is a person, a perfectly formed individual, looking like the body which we now see with our natural eyes. Spirits living in the flesh, unless operated upon abnormally by some spiritual influence, cannot see spiritual beings. A spirit can see spirit. Spirit ministers to spirit; and when the spirit goes out of the body that spirit can see other spirits, beings of the same character and nature, and we shall find when we have emerged from this body that we will be in the company of a great many persons like ourselves; and if we should have the experience that the Prophet Joseph had when the mob took him and tore his flesh with their nails and tried to poison him with a vial of some corrosive substance, if our spirits should be separated from our bodies as his was, we, like him, could look at our bodies and see that they are in form like our living spiritual realities.

"The body without the spirit is dead." The spirit without the body is not dead; that is a real personality, a living individual, and the body of flesh is but a house to dwell in or a covering for it to wear; not essential to its

existence but essential to its progress, essential to its experience on the earth and ultimately in its glorified condition, essential to its eternal happiness, and progress and power in the presence of the Father.

While our Father, then, is a person, an individual, it may be asked: "How can He be here, there and everywhere at the same time?" Well, He is not, in His personality; but He can be omnipresent in a certain sense. There is a spirit, an influence, that proceeds from God that fills the immensity of space, the Holy Spirit, the Light of Truth. As the sun itself, a planet or heavenly body, is not present in any other place except that which it actually occupies, so the individual Father occupies a certain locality; and as the light that proceeds from the sun spreads abroad upon all the face of the earth and lights up other planets as well as this earth, penetrating to the circumference of an extended circle in the midst of God's great universe, so the light of God, the Spirit of God, proceeding forth from the presence of God, "fills the immensity of space."

It is the light and the life of all things. It is the light and the life of man. It is the life of the animal creation. It is the life of the vegetable creation. It is in the earth on which we stand; it is in the stars that shine in the firmament; it is in the moon that reflects the light of the sun; it is in the sun and is the light of the sun, and the power by which it was made; and these grosser particles of light that illuminate the heavens and enable us to behold the works of nature, are from that same Spirit which enlightens our minds and unfolds the things of God. As that light comes forth from the sun so the light of God comes to us. That natural light is the grosser substance or particles of the same Spirit.

Spirit is a substance, it is not immaterial; it may have some properties that are different from that which we see and handle, which we call matter, but it is a reality, a substantial reality. And spirit can understand spirit and grasp spirit. A spiritual person can take the hand of another spiritual person and it is substantial. A person in a body could not grasp a spirit, for that spirit has different properties to those of our bodies, and it is governed by different laws to those that govern us in this sphere of mortality. A spiritual substance, organized into form, occupies room and space just as much in its sphere as these natural particles occupy space in this sphere.

God our Father, then, is a person, an individual, and he really is our Father, actually and literally. We sprang from Him. He is the Father of our spirits, and not only the Father of the spirits of the Latter-day Saints but the Father of the spirits of latter-day sinners. He is the God and the Father of the spirits of all flesh. Not only those that now dwell on the earth, but all people who dwell aforesaid; all people who ever lived upon the face of this planet, are the children of God. And so with people who dwell upon other planets, they are the offspring of God. And our Father and our God is an individual, a personality; He is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth; but He dwells in a tabernacle, in a body, though that body is different from our bodies, it being a spiritual body. It is quickened by spirit. Our bodies are quickened by that corruptible substance which we call blood; but our Heavenly Father's body is quickened by spirit. It is not governed by the same laws as those by which earthly bodies are governed. It is a body something similar to that which Jesus had after His resurrection. Jesus Christ, when He rose from the dead, had the same body that He had upon the earth, but a change had been wrought upon it. He had shed His blood for the remission of sins. This body was quickened by spirit. "He was put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit," so we are told in the Scriptures, and He was raised up from the dead by that Spirit. Paul says, in his Epistle to the Romans, viii chap., 11 v.:

But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.

Jesus Christ's body was put in the sepulchre a natural body; it was raised a spiritual body. It was placed there in weakness; it was raised in strength. It was a mortal body when placed in the sepulchre; but when it came forth quickened by spirit, it was no longer a natural or mortal body, it was a spiritual and an immortal body; and with that immortal body He ascended from the earth. It was no longer bound by the laws of earthly gravitation as it was before. He stood upon the mount of Olives, in the presence of His disciples, and ascended up to heaven from their midst and disappeared from their view. He could manifest Himself to them and then take Himself away from their gaze. He could enter the room when the doors were shut, as He did in the case when His disciples gathered in secret for fear of the Jews, and manifest Himself to them. And yet at the same time His body was tangible, and the unbelieving Thomas could reach forth his hands and thrust it into His side and put his fingers into the prints of the nails. But this body was a glorious body, "the glorious body of the Son of God," and it was in the fashion and likeness of the glorious body of His Eternal Father. It was a celestial body, quickened by the celestial glory. And if we wish to attain to the Heavenly kingdom we must walk in the ways of life and sanctify ourselves before God, as Jesus did, so that the in-

fluence and power of the celestial kingdom can be with us. Then, in the resurrection, when we come forth from the grave, we shall be quickened also by the operation of the celestial glory and receive of the same, even the fullness thereof, and be made like unto Jesus Christ, and thus become like unto God the Father.

As I have previously explained, God is not everywhere present personally, but He is omnipresent in the power of that spirit—the Holy Spirit—which animates all created things; that which is the light of the sun, and of the soul as well as the light of the eye, that which enables the inhabitants of the earth to understand and perceive the things of God. As the light of the sun reveals natural objects to our eyes, so the spirit that comes from God, with a fitting place to occupy and conditions to operate in, reveals the things of God. We see natural things by the light of the sun. We see spiritual things by spiritual light, and he that is spiritual discerneth all things and judgeth all things, and he that is not spiritual cannot comprehend spiritual things. They are foolishness to him. And while the Saints of God, quickened by the spirit which they have obtained through obedience to the Gospel, can comprehend these things of which I am speaking, and discern their meaning and signification, those that are wicked and corrupt and obey not the ordinances of God cannot see these things nor comprehend them as they are, but they are foolishness to them.

But, if God is an individual spirit and dwells in a body, the question will arise, "Is He the Eternal Father?" Yes, He is the Eternal Father. "Is it a fact that He never had a beginning?" In the elementary particles of his organism, He did not. But if He is an organized Being there must have been a time when that being was organized. This, some one will say, would infer that God had a beginning. This spirit which pervades all things, which is the light and life of all things, by which our Heavenly Father operates, by which He is omnipotent, never had a beginning and never will have an end. It is the light of truth; it is the spirit of intelligence. We are told in the revelations of God to us that "Intelligence or the light of truth never was created, neither indeed can be." And we are told further, that this Spirit, when it is manifest, is God moving in His glory. When we look up to the heavens and behold the starry worlds, which are kingdoms, we behold God moving in His majesty and in His power. Now, this Spirit always existed; it always operated, but it is not understood, and cannot be comprehended except through organisms. If you see a living blade of grass you see a manifestation of that Spirit which is called God. If you see an animal of any kind on the face of the earth, having life, there is a manifestation of that Spirit. If you see a man you behold its most perfect earthly manifestation. And if you see a glorified man, a man who has passed through the various grades of being, who has overcome all things, who has been raised from the dead, who has been quickened by this spirit in its fullness, there you see manifested, in its perfection, this eternal, beginningless, endless spirit of intelligence.

Such a Being is our Father and our God, and we are following in His footsteps. He has attained to perfection. He has arisen to kingdoms of power. He comprehends all things, because in Him dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead, bodily. He is a perfect manifestation, expression and revelation of this eternal essence, this spirit of eternal, everlasting intelligence or light of truth. It is embodied in His spiritual personality or spiritual organism. This spirit cannot be fully comprehended in our finite state. It quickens all things. As we are told in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, it is:

The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon His throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things.—Sec. LXXXVIII, ¶ 13.

That spirit exists wherever there is a particle of material substance; that spirit is round about it, and in it, and through it; but that we may comprehend it it must be manifested through organisms. The perfection of its manifestation is in the personality of a being called God. That is a person who has passed through all the gradations of being, and who contains within Himself the fullness, manifested and expressed, of this divine spirit which is called God.

Some people may think this is rather a low idea of a Divine Being. But I think it a most exalted one. The person whom I worship I acknowledge as my Father. Through Him I may learn to understand the secrets and mysteries of eternity, those things that never had a beginning and will never have an end. He has ascended above all things after descending below all things. He has fought his way from the depths up to the position He now occupies. He holds it by virtue of his goodness, of His might, of His majesty, of His power. He occupies that position by virtue of being in perfect harmony with all that is right, and true, and beautiful, and glorious and progressive. He is the perfect embodiment and expression of the eternal principles of right. He has won that position by His own exertions, by His own faithfulness, by His own righteousness. Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God in the flesh, but His firstborn in the spirit, has climbed His way up in a similar manner. He loved righteous-

ness and hated iniquity. He kept every law and every commandment. He knew no sin and guile was not found in his mouth. He loved not His own life, as a paramount consideration but sacrificed it to atone for the sins of others. Whatever He learned was right, He practised, and He broke no commandment of the Father, but obeyed every one. He came not to do His own will, but the will of the Father that sent Him, and because He did this and was faithful unto death, He was exalted on high. He overcame evil. He conquered mortality. He triumphed over death. He conquered that being who is the expression of evil principles, who is the embodiment of the principles of darkness, who is the embodiment of all the principles that are in opposition to those that exist and burn in the bosom of Deity. He met him and conquered him and overcame him. He, being in the truth and living by the truth; therefore he is now to us, "the way, the truth, and the life." Overcoming all things He was entitled to inherit all things, and all that the Father hath was given unto Him. And we read:

The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what thing soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." (John v. 20.)

As the Father had taken His upward course in worlds before this, so Jesus Christ followed in His footsteps in every respect; therefore He is entitled to sit down at the right hand of God in the heavens, to sit on His throne and be one with the Father in all things; and all the power and glory, and dominion that the Father hath He conferred also upon Jesus. And the promise to the sons of God on the earth is, that if they will follow in the footsteps of Jesus they shall be also exalted and shall partake of that glory which He partakes of, and they shall become Gods, even the sons of God, and "all things" shall be theirs. And we are told in the revelations of God to us in the latter days, that if we are faithful in all things "all that Father hath" shall be given unto us. We shall become like Him, and we shall receive power and dominion and glory similar to that which He enjoys, only He will always be above us, God as our Father and Jesus Christ our elder brother.

Now, we can understand a little about a being like this; but a being of the character that divines attempt to describe is one we cannot understand at all. They say that there are three of them and yet there is only one; that God has no body, neither parts nor passions. Yet this thing that has no substance and no parts, we are told, has three parts, one part of which had a body, and that body was composed of parts. And we are told also that it has no passions. Yet this one part of that thing which has no body and no parts and no passions had a body and parts and had passions. Jesus experienced the same things that a man experiences, lived like a man, and died like a man, to some extent. Now, who can understand these contradictions which are to be found in the creeds of modern Christendom? The Athanasian Creed was read in the Church of England, as it is called, when I was a boy, and I believe it is now. I think the American Episcopal Church has discarded it, which was very sensible. It says:

Whosoever will be saved, before all things he must hold the Catholic faith, which faith except he do keep whole and undefiled he shall without doubt, perish everlastingly. And the Catholic faith is this: "That we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son and another of the Holy Ghost, but their glory is equal and their majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son and such the Holy Ghost. The Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God. The Father is Lord, the Son is Lord and the Holy Ghost is Lord, and yet there are not three Lords, but one Lord. For while we are compelled by Christian verity to acknowledge each person by himself to be both God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Catholic faith to say that there be three Gods or three Lords."

It goes on to show how that these three are all exactly alike, and then to declare that they are all essentially different. It explains that the Son is begotten while the Father is not, and then that the Holy Ghost is proceeding not begotten, while the Son is not proceeding neither is the Father, yet at the same time they are all the same, and to cap the climax of the pile of absurdities it announces that:

The Father is incomprehensible, the Son is incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible, and yet they are not three incomprehensibles, but one incomprehensible.

Well, that is an attempt of man to explain God. As I said in the beginning of my remarks, we do not pretend that we can comprehend God in His fullness in our finite and mortal condition here on the earth, because He is an infinite being. But we are promised that "the day shall come when we shall comprehend God, being quickened in Him and by Him." Jesus said:

This is life eternal, to know thee, the only living and true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

How can we learn to know God? We can learn of our Father by hearkening to His voice, by listening to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit, that spirit that comes from Him. "They that are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God." We can understand much concerning Him by the power of the Holy Ghost. The gift of the Ho