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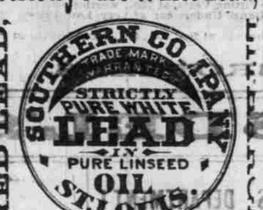

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DISCOURSE

BY

APOSTLE JOHN W. TAYLOR

Delivered in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, April 6th, 1888.

I feel thankful this morning for the privilege of meeting with the Latter-day Saints in conference, and inasmuch as President Snow has requested me to make a few remarks, I trust that I may enjoy the Spirit of Truth, even a portion of the Holy Ghost, that my words may be directed thereby through the prayers and faith of the Saints.

We are blessed with pleasant weather; with peace and quietness; health and strength; and everything seems favorable to the enjoyment of a good conference.

Since we last met together many changes have taken place among the Latter-day Saints, some of which have been of a pleasant nature, and others unpleasant. There are those in our midst who have embraced the Gospel, and renewed their covenants; others who have been severed from the Church. Here are two features of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, one is that of pleasure and the other of regret and disappointment. I trust that, should there be any of the latter present, they will listen with humility to the remarks of your fellow servant this morning.

All the children of men are prone to weakness and imperfections, some to a greater extent than others. It seems necessary, according to the laws of the Church, to deal with some individuals in rather a summary way when they are guilty of certain offenses. This being the case, we have a yearly record of a large number of people who are disfellowshipped from their brethren and sisters, and others excommunicated entirely from the Church.

I desire this morning, if I shall be so led, to speak a little unto those who have imperfections, and should there be any present this morning who are perfect, it will be entirely a loss of time for them to remain and listen to my remarks, and I will take no offense whatever at such individuals withdrawing from the congregation.

I have been pained in my feelings, during the last twelve months, at the number of persons that have been cut off from the Church, and I can realize that the cause of this has been due to imperfections, a giving way to feelings and passions that cometh not of God. I desire before going further in my remarks to say, candidly, that so far as I am personally concerned it requires a greater exertion than many people suppose for me to control my own temper, to look after myself and let other people alone. If you have any doubt upon this subject inquire of some of my neighbors. I desire that other people shall let me alone, and I presume all have desires of a similar nature. However, I wish to say that there is a way for all to repent of their sins. If we are given to drunkenness, let us forsake strong drink, and show to our families that we have repented of that habit and are worthy of their respect. If we have stolen our neighbor's property as a thief steals by night, or as a legal professor steals before the courts of law, let us repent and steal no more, and the Lord will forgive us. If we have been in the habit of lying, we should repent of the habit and learn to tell the truth. If we have been in the habit of loving lies after they have been manufactured by others, we should forsake our love for that which is untrue. We read in the Scriptures concerning those that should be outside the city of the New Jerusalem; that there should be whoremongers and seducers and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie, that is, all who love lies after they have been manufactured by others. Are there any such in this congregation? If there are, let them repent and begin to love the truth. If we are in the habit of giving way to our temper and speaking harshly to our neighbors, we can repent and show by our future conduct that we have repented and surely the Lord will bless us. Let us be temperate in all things that health and strength may be the inheritance of our children, and that we may grow up before the Lord in purity, and if we have been intemperate, let us repent of our sins, and the Lord will bless us in accordance with our reformation; for we are told all men will be rewarded according to the deeds done in the body. This to me is a very plain statement. It means to me that if I break a law of nature I will have to pay the penalty either in this world, or the world to come. If we have neglected our prayers, whether family or secret, let us repent before the Lord and have prayers morning and evening. This is the order of the Church. Whenever you see a man beginning to apostatize from the Church the first thing you will notice is that he neglects his prayers. Therefore I exhort you all, my brethren and sisters, that if you are in the habit of neglecting this duty, repent and return unto the Lord, supplicate Him for His Holy Spirit, express your gratitude, day after day, in simple, plain language, for the blessings which have been bestowed upon you.

Yesterday morning I attended conference in this hall. There were but very few persons present. Of course I naturally came to the conclusion that the cause of this small attendance was that the people had gone to fast meeting in their several wards. This is a good thing. It is pleasing in the sight of the Lord that you should fast and pray at the proper season and in the proper way. I trust you had an excellent time; for it has been my experience that the testimony meetings of the Church are the most interesting of any that I attend among the Latter-day Saints. At these meetings we can carry out the admonition of Paul. If any one of us have a doctrine to teach, or if we desire to prophesy or speak in tongues, we can, at these meetings, speak, one at a time, for the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets and there is no confusion in the assembly. I say, therefore, to those who may have been in the habit of neglecting their fast meetings, repent and attend these meetings in the future. I also desire to exhort you to pay your tithing faithfully before the Lord. Abraham of old, a man whom God so loved that He called him the father of the faithful, paid tithes of all he possessed unto Melchisedec, the great High Priest, and Melchisedec blessed him with the Priesthood. The law of tithing was instituted by the Lord himself through the Prophet Moses. It was observed by the children of Israel throughout all their travels in the wilderness. The Aaronic Priesthood was set apart for the purpose of handling one-tenth of all they possessed. The Lord has revealed the same law in this day for the purpose of conducting the machinery of the Church and providing for those who are in want. If there are any here this morning who have neglected to attend to this duty, I say unto them, repent, and make covenant with the Lord that you will pay tithes in the future. Then you will be blessed in your outgoings and incomings. If the Lord has given unto you an inheritance in Zion, blessed you with a home, appreciate such a blessing as one that is of great value. If you have made covenant with the Lord for time and eternity in your marital relations, remember to keep such covenant sacred before the Lord. If you have failed to do this, repent and do your first works over again, and the Lord will forgive you your sins.

I do not wish to dwell further upon the duties of the Saints. I have said so much in order to introduce a few of remarks to which I desire to draw your attention. It is this: My short experience in the Church has convinced me of one fact, and that is, whosoever receives a testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that testimony will remain with them as long as they keep the commandments of God and do not sin sufficiently to drive away that testimony. When I do that which is wrong, does the testimony which God has given unto me cause me to rejoice? No. It causes me to bow my head and feel ashamed. Why? Because I know I shall be rewarded according to the deeds done in the body. If I do evil my reward will be evil; if I do good my reward will be good. Hence Christ said forgetting evil doers, let them alone for they will all get rewarded. When I do good, which is not very often, but what little good I do, it causes me to rejoice. When I magnify my calling it causes me to rejoice all the day long; but when I neglect any duty devolving upon me, it causes sorrow in my feelings. Is it not so with you all? It is so with all the Saints.

I desire now, having said so much, to go a little further. I have had come unto me during the last year men and women who have sinned in one way or another. Some came crying like children, what shall I do to recover my fellowship with the church, or to retain it, what reparation can I make before the Lord, is there any way by which I can break the chain of my sins and throw off the shackles of my imperfections? What did I say to such people? That as long as there is repentance in a man or woman there is hope. The great God who created the children of men never designed that the principle of hope to overcome imperfections, should be destroyed within the bosom of the children of men. Therefore, I say unto you, if you have sinned before the Lord repent, make covenant with him, and He will grant unto you forgiveness. How should we repent when we have sinned? Isaiah the Prophet says, let the wicked man forsake his ways and the unrighteous his thoughts, and return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him and unto our God, for He will abundantly pardon. Who is a wicked man? Who is an unrighteous man? It is he who commits sin. Therefore I say lift up your heads, O ye Saints, and trust in God the Eternal Father. He is not a tyrant. He loves His children. If they make mistakes, He is willing, when asked, to forgive. He will not denounce them for ever and ever. That is a long time. But He will chide us, rebuke us, and call us back to the ways of peace and salvation. He will let us pay the penalty for the law we have broken. Then we can make atonement with Him. Many of you may not understand my remarks unless I make a few more. I will therefore say unto you who hear the words of my mouth this day there have been remarks made by myself at times, perhaps by others many times, the object being to terrorize the people against sin and wickedness; and the speakers have gone so far in their remarks in denouncing sin and corruption that they destroyed in the bosom of the children of men all hope, and I believe that going to excess in these things does more harm than good. Take away all prospect of redemption from any man or woman, and that soul is lost. Why? Because amolition is gone. They do not endeavor to make amends for their sins because they are told that efforts will be of no avail. I wish to say that when such doctrine includes time and eternity—except for the sin of murder, and the sin of lying against the Holy Ghost—all such doctrine is false before the Lord. I say to one and all repent of your sins and return unto the Lord and seek Him, and He will abundantly pardon and forgive you. Yet you will have to pay the penalty for the sins you have committed. The Savior, in speaking of such things, says that such persons shall be cast into prison, and they shall not come out from thence until they have paid the uttermost farthing, meaning that there would be a time when they should be released. Let me read to you this morning a little piece from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants:

"Wherefore I revoke not the judgments which I shall pass, but woes shall go forth, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, yea, to those who are found on my left hand;

"Nevertheless, it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written endless torment.

"Again, it is written eternal damnation; wherefore, more express than other scriptures, that it might work upon the hearts of the children of men, altogether for my name's glory.

"Wherefore, I will explain unto you this mystery, for it is meet unto you to know, even as mine Apostles.

"I speak unto you that are chosen in this thing, even as one, that you may enter into my rest.

"For, behold, the mystery of godliness, how great is it? For, behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for endless is my name: wherefore—

Eternal punishment is God's punishment; Endless punishment is God's punishment."

In order that you may understand me I will give an illustration in regard to the law against murder. When George Washington lived, after the Declaration of Independence was passed, in the United States of America the law for the punishment of murder in the first degree was that the murderer should be hanged by the neck until he was dead, dead, dead. It is the same law today. That human law exterminates all hope for this world. Then there is a law for the punishment of manslaughter, the conditions of which are that a man may be confined in a dungeon for ten, fifteen or twenty-five years. Men have gone to prison under that law. They have stayed ten years, then they have been released, having paid the penalty according to all human law. That law has been in force probably for the last one hundred years so far as this nation is concerned. As to the term "eternal punishment," it does not follow that a man is to be punished for ever after he has complied with the law. He will have to pay the penalty for every offense, but the punishment will not be eternally inflicted.

I speak in this wise in order that the sinner may not be without hope, but that you may look forward until the time of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord, when He shall pardon the sins of those who have repented before Him. How shall we repent? We should rend our hearts and rend our garments, and return unto the Lord in great humility, and He will have mercy upon us if we sin no more.

Yesterday reference was made to the preaching of the Gospel to the dead. I wish to use the same quotation in order to illustrate to your minds that there is hope for men though they fail to obtain forgiveness in this world. There will be an opportunity in the next world if they have not committed the unpardonable sin. The Apostle Peter speaks of this in his epistle. He refers to the Savior, after He was put to death, having gone, during the three days that His body lay in the tomb, to preach to the spirits in prison who were disobedient when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was preparing. What does this mean? It simply means what we read here in the Book of Genesis, that the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. They were committing whoredoms and all kinds of abominations before the Lord, and He concluded that the better way would be to drown them all with a flood after being warned to repent by His Prophet Noah. A few thousand years afterwards Christ preached to these spirits in prison. Did He go to preach to perfect men? No. They were sinners, liars, whoremongers, seducers, and Christ, to carry out His own mission, went to them in the spirit world to release them from the prison house, after they had paid the penalty of their crimes. Christ preached the Gospel to them, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. Therefore, I say unto you look up unto God the Father of the spirits of all flesh. There is hope. Repent and renew your covenants. There is a feeling among the Latter-day Saints not to forgive one another. We have gotten into the habit, in the case of a man or a woman, who has committed some sin, of speaking to men of your time speaking evil of them, taking up in our memories everything that will go to convince us that they have not only sinned in one way but in many others. Our hearts are not prone to be charitable. We entertain the feeling expressed by the rich man mentioned in the Scripture and are apt to thank God that we are not as other men, that we pay tithes and offerings, etc., and therefore think ourselves very good; while the poor goes to the Lord and in the humility of his soul asks Him to have mercy upon him a miserable sinner. Let us therefore be filled with charity towards our fellow men. Wherever there is contention and division among a people there are two spirits made manifest. One is the spirit of Christ, the other is the spirit of Satan. How oft should we forgive one another? said the Apostle unto the Savior. Possibly this Apostle wanted to receive some praise from the Savior for having forgiven his neighbor seven times. The Savior said if they smite you on one cheek, turn the other. That is something I have never been able to do, but I am practicing at it every day. The worst of it is, the more I practice the worse I get. The Apostle thought he had accomplished a great thing in forgiving his neighbor seven times. The Savior, however, said to forgive your neighbor seventy times seven. That is a great number of times. If you, my brethren and sisters, lived next door to me you would have an opportunity of exercising this seventy-times-seven injunction, and your sevens would run out.

I speak plainly and familiarly with you this morning that you may know how I feel on this subject. These cast iron feelings, this disposition to refuse to forgive our neighbor, this desire to exact the pound of flesh for the pound of gold, figuratively speaking, do not belong to the Gospel of Christ. Is there any person before me who has the failing? I have noticed that when persons leave the congregation since I invited those that were perfect to retire. I have seen more perfect people here today than I have ever seen before in all my life. I hope you will follow their example, not that I would have you all leave until I get through with my remarks.

Another thing let me say unto you: for I do not desire to be before the Lord, nor do I desire to make a picture here of one thing and believe another in my heart. I say there is hope for all men if they will repent of their sins. Some might say, however, that if you offer a chance to a sinner to repent he will go on sinning a life time. Very likely he will. I once was fireman for a steam engine at a saw mill. I got my clothes fastened in one of the escape valves one day, and it got loose and burned me very badly. There is no danger of me getting my clothes fastened in that valve again for the mere purpose of hearing the steam whistle out of that valve and for the pleasure of getting better again. I have had all I want of steam. Does it follow that because a person sins once, and there is hope offered unto him that he will continue to sin? There is no hope if we continue to sin, but if we repent there is; for we do not repent if we repeat our sins. True repentance is that which needs not to be repented of. When certain men asked the Savior what should be done with the woman who had been caught in the act of adultery, they tried to entrap him. They knew what the law of Moses was. The Savior, however, simply wrote in the sand with his finger, "He that is without sin among you let him cast the first stone." When He looked up He found the woman all alone. He asked the woman where her accusers were. She replied that she had none. He said, "Neither do I accuse you. Go thy way and sin no more." Here is an example of the Savior of the world. He did not say unto this woman, "thou shalt be damned for ever and ever." No. Eternal punishment is God's punishment, but it is not eternally inflicted. The Savior on one occasion made a parable something like this: There was a man had two sons. One of the sons left his father's house, went out among the people and spent all of his substance, we are told, in riotous living. In due time he was reduced to beggary and shame, and he was clothed in rags. Being rejected by all men he returned to his father, and was received and forgiven. The young man received hope. The father rejoiced that he had not left his house for ever.

I have spoken plainly upon these subjects. However, whosoever has a testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ when they fall into sin they are full of remorse; for the Gospel is a savor of life unto life or of death unto death. It is a matter of rewards and punishments, reward for good and punishment for evil. It is better that one should perish than that a whole nation should die in unbelief. I believe the words of the prophet in this respect. Nevertheless, in regard to those who have not sinned unto death, let us not discourage them, let us give them hope, let us show them the infinite mercy and goodness of God. Eternity is a long time. When you say forever, that means a great deal longer than you or I can conceive of.

Now, I have asked you to pay tithes and offerings; to attend fast day meetings; to attend to prayer; to attend to all the duties devolving upon you; to steal not; to lie not; to bear not false witness against your neighbors and yet I can say as Paul said in his day to the Corinthians, though ye bestow all your goods to feed the poor; and though ye give your bodies to be burned and have not charity it will profit you nothing. Though ye speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity ye will become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Faith, hope and charity, but the greatest of these is charity." Obliterate the principle of hope in the mind of any man and you destroy the prospects of that being for this world, and if it was not for the mercy of God, the Eternal Father, possibly we would destroy the prospects for ever. The Lord is merciful unto all mankind. I say unto you, therefore, at the opening of this conference, dispense with all hard feelings; let us partake of the sacrament with clean hands and pure hearts before the Lord.

I do not desire to lengthen my remarks. Those who wish to judge my remarks in the spirit of fault finding, I would say to them, judge what I have said by the spirit of righteousness. I will close by referring to a wise man, who, in alluding to the different classes of humanity, used a figure of speech somewhat as follows: Mankind, he said, is composed of four classes. The first is like the bone glass, that is those you pour the sand in one end it will come out of the other. When certain individuals of this kind hear remarks, these remarks go in at one ear and out at the other. The second class was likened to a sponge that is placed in a vessel of clear water. When the sponge is full and wrung out again, the only difference is that the water is a little drier than before. The third class was likened unto a jelly bag, into which a housemaid pours in the jelly and after it is stirred it goes through the bag into the vessel below, and inside the jelly bag are all the impurities of the jelly. This class, therefore, he likened to those who hear things and glean out all that is impure, and leave out all the good, and carry the impure matter around with them wherever they go. Therefore, look out for ever sanctimonious jelly bags, for I am not so sure but that you will find more than one righteous Pharisee in this congregation today. The fourth class this wise man likened unto the diamond diggers of Alconda. They dig the earth, and every time they came across a pure diamond they would cast away all the filth and all that was impure, and keep nothing but the pure sparkling diamonds.

I trust that all who are here present today, after hearing my remarks and reflecting upon them, and after considering all things in times that are past, and weighing the circumstances that attended the counsel then given, will come to the conclusion that what I have said is not like muddy water out of the spout, nor the jelly bags, but it is the diamond, the pearl of great price, that I have desired to hold up before this congregation.

May God bless us, that our hearts may expand unto the sinner, and I say unto all who are sinners, come one and come all and partake of the waters of life, thoroughly repent of your sins, go down into the waters of baptism and be baptized by an authorized servant of God, and I can promise you, by the testimony which I have in the name of Jesus Christ, that you shall know that this work is of God. God bless all the friends of Zion and all the honest in heart in all the world.

My testimony is that though we are passing through a cloud today, the cloud will clear away, and we shall have clear weather bye and bye. I expect, however, that as long as the kingdom of God is on the earth, we shall have storms and sunshine, but the Lord will work all things for the good of His people. Our enemies can do nothing against the truth but what will be for the truth. It will grow like the mustard plant. The seeds will scatter, and grow up a mighty forest. The enemies of Zion might as well say to the great sun "stop sending forth your rays," as to seek to stop the work of the Great Jehovah. They cannot stop its progress, for it is founded on the rock of eternal revelation and its rays will shine forth upon the hearts of the children of men. May we have wisdom according to our day. May He comfort the brethren who are in prison, and bless those who have their families in charge. May our hearts be drawn out to the widows and orphans.

May the blessing of God rest upon all. I feel like preaching the Gospel. Have just got started. I had a short coat made for this conference, so that my tail could not be pulled. Amen.

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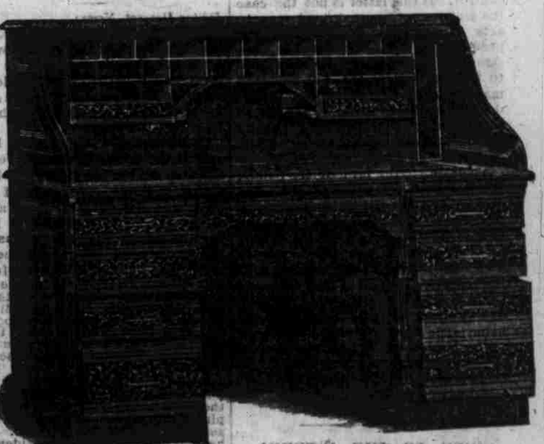

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