

## DISCOURSE

By Elder GEORGE Q. CANNON,  
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REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

"Moreover he commanded the people that dwelt in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might be encouraged in the law of the Lord.

"And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance the first fruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly.

"And concerning the children of Israel and Judah, that dwelt in the cities of Judah, they also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of holy things which were consecrated unto the Lord their God, and laid them by heaps.

"In the third month they began to lay the foundation of the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month.

"And when Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed the Lord, and his people Israel.

"Then Hezekiah questioned with the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps.

"And Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok answered him, and said, Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the Lord hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store."

I have read this portion of Scripture, it having suggested itself to my mind in view of our condition, and the circumstances which surround us as a people. The law of tithing is of very ancient origin. How early it was observed by the people of God is not clearly set forth in the Scriptures, but we have an account of its observance as early as the days of Abraham and Melchisedec. We have also, anterior to that, an account given us in the Scriptures of the bringing forward of offerings by Cain and Abel, one bringing the first fruits of the earth, and the other the first fruits of his flocks, as offerings unto the Lord their God. From the days of Abraham down to the days of Jesus the law of tithing was observed by the people of God. It was made a perpetual ordinance, in fact the Lord promised unto Aaron and his children that it should be an ordinance for ever. And there is this remarkable fact connected with this law—whenever it was strictly observed, the blessings of God rested upon the people, and when it was neglected the anger of God was kindled against them; and a careful perusal of the Bible reveals to us that neglect on the part of the children of Israel to pay tithing was one of the most fruitful causes of unbelief, darkness of mind, departure from the ways of God, and falling into idolatrous practices.

I may be asked, why was this the case? Had the Lord need of the fruits of the earth? Had he need of the cattle? Had he need of the firstborn children? Had he need of a tenth of their gold and silver? Was there any necessity for these things to be devoted to him because of any want on his part? Of course not. The fruits of the earth are his, the cattle on a thousand hills are his, and the gold and silver are his, he created them, and he can cover or uncover them at his will. The heaven of heavens is his dwelling place, and he has no need of a temple built with hands; yet in the economy of Heaven, in the dealings of God with his children he reveals unto them laws, ordinances and institutions which he requires them to observe, and which when observed bring blessings, but a disregard of which brings down his anger and indignation upon them. There is nothing plainer in Scripture than this.

God commands his children to believe in him, and to render obedience to his laws; he commands them to call upon his Son Jesus Christ, or, rather, to call upon him in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. He commands them to pray unto him; he commands them to repent of their sins and to be baptized for their remission, to have hands laid upon them for the reception of the Holy Ghost, and to observe other ordinances that he has revealed. What for? Does prayer to him advance him? Does belief in him contribute particularly to his happiness? Does repentance of sin on the part of the creature add anything particularly to God's glory? Does baptism for the remission of sins have any saving effect upon him? Does the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost have the effect to increase his light, knowledge, wisdom or power? We all recognize the fact that these commandments are given for man's benefit, to increase his happiness, and to prepare him for salvation and exaltation in God's Kingdom. So also with the law of tithing: it does not, when obeyed by man, add to God's comfort, contribute to his wealth, increase his happiness, or furnish him with that of which he would be destitute if it were not obeyed; but it is given to man, and he is required to obey it that he may receive the reward, and that he may acknowledge by this act—by this payment of the tenth of his increase—that all he obtains is the gift, and comes from the

beneficent hand, of God, and that he is dependent upon God. Hence Abraham, after returning from the conquest of the kings, when he was met by Melchisedec, paid to him the tithes of all, acknowledging by this act the divinity of the law, and the necessity of obedience thereunto. So strict was the Lord upon this point in his dealings with the children of Israel in the wilderness, that he gave very strict commandment unto Moses and Aaron, and to those who presided over and officiated among the people that they were to be very careful to collect and the people were to be very careful to pay their tithing.

One object of enforcing this law among Israel in ancient days was to sustain the service of the house of God. The tribe of Levi was selected from amongst all the other tribes—as the Lord's peculiar inheritance. In the division of the land of Canaan among the different tribes, the tribe of Levi was left without an inheritance. The eleven tribes had their portions of Canaan set apart to them under the direction of the servant of God, but the tribe of Levi had no inheritance given unto them. They were told by the Lord that they were his inheritance, and that which they should have as an inheritance should be the tenth of the product of all Israel: the tenth of the labor, the tenth of the cattle, the tenth of the gold and silver, the tenth of the fruits of the earth, and of everything that was produced in the land. And so strict was this law, that when an animal passed under the rod, to use the expression of Scripture, and thereby became a proper animal to be devoted to the service of God, though it were a choice animal, and one which the owner of it desired to retain, the law provided that it could not be retained: it was devoted to the Lord, and was holy on that account. And if the owner of it were to substitute another animal instead of it, they both became holy unto the Lord, and both became tithing animals and had to be dedicated unto him, so strict was the Lord in enforcing this law of tithing upon Israel. I often think of the practice which prevails among us in this respect, how differently we act to what ancient Israel did, and how it would pinch some of us if the law of tithing were enforced among us as strictly as it was among them. Not only was this the law of tithing, as I have rehearsed it, with regard to substitution; but if a man wanted to redeem that which was devoted for tithing, a certain valuation was put upon it, and in addition to this valuation a certain sum of money had to be paid before it could be redeemed. In other words tithing had to be paid in kind, and if a man wanted to redeem his tithing he had to pay not only the money valuation of it, but an additional sum besides, before the redemption could be effected.

You can readily see, with a little reflection, the object the Lord had in being thus strict with his people: it was to prevent violations of that law, and to enforce the strictness in observing it which was necessary to secure the promised blessings.

I have said that a tenth of all the produce of Israel went to the tribe of Levi; the Levites also had to pay a tenth of that which they received, and that tenth was given to the priests, those who ministered in the priesthood in the midst of the people, so that there was in Israel a standing ministry—a tribe chosen from all the tribes of Israel, whose office it was to minister in the things of God, having been called specially by God to this service.

You doubtless recollect that the Lord also required his children—the people of Israel—to set apart the first-born male in every family to be his. They had been redeemed in Egypt, or rather they had been saved from the scourge which fell upon all the families of Egypt. When God pleaded with Pharaoh, through Moses, to let the people go, destruction fell on all the households of Egypt, the firstborn in every one being slain. But among the children of Israel the firstborn were spared, and the Lord claimed them as his; but it was inconvenient for them to be used in the service of the Lord and he, therefore, after Israel had left Egypt, commanded that all their firstborn should be numbered; and after all of a certain age had been numbered, he commanded that the tribe of Levi should be numbered, and upon numbering them it was found that the firstborn of Israel outnumbered the Levites by two hundred and seventy-three, if I remember aright. The Lord had already stated that it was his intention to take the tribe of Levi instead of the firstborn of Israel, and when it was found that the firstborn outnumbered the Levites by two hundred and seventy-three he commanded that they should be redeemed, and that the redemption money should be handed over to the tribe of Levi.

These were very singular laws and ordinances, but God had a design in view in enforcing them. Everything he does is dictated by infinite wisdom, and when the people strictly complied with these laws and ordinances I have mentioned the Lord blessed them in all things, so much so that it became a proverb in the midst of Israel—"Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of thy increase, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses burst forth with new wine." When the people honored the Lord with their substance his blessings rested upon them and they were prospered. The palmer worm, blight, grasshopper and other evils which afflicted the land under some circumstances, were removed far from

them. Their trees did not cast their fruit untimely, and they produced in abundance, and Israel prospered and waxed fat in the land. They spread abroad on the right hand and on the left, and the land teemed with fertility. There were times when Israel neglected this law, when they fell into idolatry, became careless and indifferent concerning the requirements of the Lord; when the tribe of Levi forsook the service of God and became idolaters; when the priests quit the service of Jehovah, and the temples became desecrated and filled with rubbish. It was during one of these periods that Hezekiah came to the throne of his father Ahaz, who had allowed the ordinances of God to fall into disuse. He put aside the service of God and instituted in its stead idolatrous service. Tithing had been neglected, and when Hezekiah came to the throne, his heart being set in him to do right, he commenced to cleanse the temple, and to restore the ordinances of the house of God, and the ministers who had been set apart to this service he called back to its performance, and the people brought in their cattle, wine, oil, honey and in fact a tithe of all their substance as well as freewill offerings unto the Lord; and when the king looked upon it, we are told, in the words which I have read, that he blessed the Lord and his people Israel, and upon inquiry of the chief priest he was told that "since the people began to bring in the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty, for the Lord hath blessed his people." The Lord blessed them because they had complied with his requirements, and they were prospered. The land prospered under their cultivation, and it yielded its strength in abundance.

In connection with this I would like to read to you, my brethren and sisters, the remarks of Malachi. You are doubtless familiar with them, but they are words which can be read and pondered on time and time again, without any loss of interest in the subject. Says Malachi:

"Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, wherein shall we return?"

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

"Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there will not be room enough to receive them.

"And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground, neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.

"And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts."

We see here portrayed, in the most graphic and striking language, the blessings that God promised unto his people Israel when they observed this law, which he had given them in the beginning; and we can also understand from the statements of Malachi the curses that would descend upon Israel if they did not observe this law. "Ye are cursed with a curse," says he, "for ye have robbed me, even this whole people." Strange language for God to use to his people, it may be thought that they should be accused of robbery, that he should look upon them as thieves, as appropriating that which was not theirs, because they did not render unto him that which he had commanded them. They had refused their tithes, they had withheld their offerings, and consequently they were cursed. "But," says he, "bring in your tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now, herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it," etc. What great promises are herein conveyed to God's people!

I have drawn your attention to this law, my brethren and sisters, to show you what it was in the days of Israel, when God communicated his mind and will unto his people. I wish to impress upon you this fact, which you can all realize and understand for yourselves if you will read, that when Israel served God, and were strict in observing this law, he blessed and prospered them, and his favor was shown towards them; but when they neglected this law his anger and indignation were kindled against them, and one of the most fruitful causes of disaster to Israel was their neglect in this particular. There were two things connected with Israel's disasters: one was neglecting to observe the laws of God, prominent among which was the law of tithing; and the other was their intermarriages with the heathen nations—those who were idolaters. This proved the destruction of the wisest king that ever reigned in Israel. It proved the destruction of the nation itself, for it brought disaster and ruin upon it.

There is something connected with the law of tithing that, when men do not have faith in God, appeals to their selfishness; and for a people to be wholehearted in its observance they need faith in God. When

Israel began to decline in faith in God their selfishness increased, and their determination became stronger and stronger to grasp everything within their reach, and to retain everything they gained possession of; and as this feeling grew, tithing and freewill offerings were withheld from the house of God, and in consequence of this the blessing of God was also withheld. There is a passage in the book of Amos on this subject, which shows the Lord pleading with Israel, to bring them back to the consideration of this law, as well as others that he had given them. The Lord says through the Prophet Amos:

"And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city and caused it not to rain upon another city; one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered.

"So two or three cities wandered into one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.

"I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmer-worm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord."

These are the calamities which God sent upon Israel with the intention to have them return to him; but notwithstanding they were poured out and pestilence visited the land, the people hardened their hearts against him, broke his laws and violated his ordinances, and his anger was enkindled against them and they were driven out from the face of the land.

This law of tithing has been revealed to the Latter-day Saints. If I remember aright, the last revelation in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, given as a revelation, is one in which this people are commanded to observe this law of tithing for ever. With the restoration of the gospel in its fullness and purity there has also been restored this law, and I am thankful to God for its revelation. I am thankful for the restoration of every principle of truth, of every law that pertains unto salvation, for they are all for the benefit of the human family; and as long as the Latter-day Saints have observed this law they have been blessed; and we know by our own experience with grasshoppers—the Lord's great army—how easily he could collect his dues from ancient Israel if they robbed him by neglecting or refusing to pay their tithes.

When men have come to this desert land and have seen the changes that have been wrought in such a brief space of time, they have wondered what has been the reason of it. The promise of God has been given to this people as it was to ancient Israel upon this point, and when the Latter-day Saints have observed the law of tithing they have been favored of God, and his Spirit has rested upon them, and not only upon them but also upon the land, and where it was once so barren, unfruitful and forbidding that it looked as though no human being could live by cultivating it, it has been converted into a fruitful field. Men say, "What wonderful results water has produced!" "What a great system this irrigation is which you practice!" True, it is a wonderful system, it is productive of wonderful results; but to my way of thinking, or according to my views, these results are due to the blessing of God on the labors of the Latter-day Saints, because they have honored him by observing the law of tithing. We have looked upon this land as the Lord's, and have viewed ourselves as his tenants. He could not come down here in person and receive from us the first fruits of the soil, or take our cattle, our gold and silver, or any of our manufactures. Hence there must be somebody to do it for him. In ancient days the children of Levi acted in this capacity: they received the tithes and offerings, but in these last days, there being none of the descendants of Aaron that we know of in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to act in this capacity, we have been under the necessity of choosing other men to hold the authority which his seed would hold if they were here in our midst, and they have been set apart for the purpose of looking after temporal things, and to take or collect the tithing, and see that it is properly managed and appropriated to the uses for which it is designed.

I know how quickly men, in looking at "Mormonism," come to the conclusion that it is a system by which a certain class will be benefited and built up. I have heard men say that the "Mormon" elders had a pretty good thing of it; that Brigham Young, as President of the church, had a very nice arrangement, and that those who were leaders in the church had every reason for desiring to retain their position, imagining, of course—though I do not know why such an imagination should be prompted unless it was because they judged us as they judged one another—that all the means that is devoted by the people for the payment of tithing is appropriated by President Young and those associated with him in conducting the affairs of the church.

Now I would not, as a speculation, endure for one month, that which President Young has to pass through—the care, responsibility, obloquy, and the weight that rests upon him continually, for the sake of the tithing alone, if I could have it all. He would not, no other man who is connected with this people would. Why do