

DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER ORSON PRATT,

DELIVERED

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REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

FORTY-FOUR years ago to-day, the kingdom of God was organized on this earth, for the last time, never to be broken up, never to be confounded or thrown down, but to continue from that time, henceforth and for ever. This kingdom was not organized by man, nor by the wisdom of man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ, he having guided and directed, by revelation, everything in regard to its organization, and bestowed authority upon his servants to perform the work, and they being only agents or instruments in his hands.

All other Christian denominations, for many long centuries, have been organized without revelation. The organizers of these various denominations did not even pretend that God had given them any information from heaven; they did not even pretend that there was one sentence which had been received in their day from the Lord in relation to the organization of their institutions. In this respect the Latter-day Saints differ widely from all Christian denominations; it is an essential difference, a peculiar characteristic, and one of the utmost importance. Every person, with a little reflection, can see that without divine information, man is utterly unable to organize the Kingdom of God on the earth. He may organize kingdoms, empires, republics and various kinds of civil government, and a great variety of governments in a religious capacity, and when he has organized them they are without foundation and authority. The Lord communicates nothing to them, but they are compelled to ponder over that which had been revealed in former ages, and get all the information they can from what God spake formerly. But how impossible it is for people to learn their duties from what God said formerly to somebody else. We might as well, in the organization of a civil government, say, "The canon of laws is sealed up, we need no legislators or Congressmen." If the question be asked why we do not need them, the answer is, "Oh, we depend upon the laws which were made by our fathers; they are sufficient for our guide." Just fancy the people of this great republic being governed by the laws enacted in the first Congress after the revolutionary fathers framed the constitution! Only think of all the people now appealing to those ancient laws, made before any of them were born, and having nothing further to govern them!

This would be just as consistent as it would be to suppose that God, some eighteen hundred years ago, gave all the information that he ever intended to give in relation to the government of his kingdom and his affairs here on the earth. You know that in civil governments laws are continually required, circumstances call them forth. Laws made last year are not always suitable to the circumstances of this year, and those made ten years ago might be altogether unsuitable for events now happening, and hence the necessity of something new, direct from the law-making department. So in regard to the kingdom of God. God spake to the ancients, but many of the words he spake then are not binding upon the people now. Some few of the great moral principles revealed to the ancients are binding for ever; but the great majority of the revelations from heaven were only suited to the individuals to whom they were given. Take, for instance, the case of Abram. He was living in Chaldea, the land of his fathers. The Lord spake to him, and commanded him to arise and leave his native country, and journey to a strange land, which was promised to him for an inheritance. Now, I ask, was any other people upon the face of the whole earth bound to obey this divine law given to Abraham? No; it was suited to him and to him only. If we were all under this ancient law, then every one of us would have to go to Chaldea; and after we got

there we should have to leave that country and go to some land which we should expect to receive for an inheritance, which would be the very height of absurdity.

Again, when God led forth Abraham into the land of Palestine, we find that he not only communicated laws to him, but that he also made precious promises relating to him and his seed, which did not pertain to all the nations and kingdoms of the earth. God commanded Abraham on that occasion to arise, and to pass through the length and breadth of the land, and to go out on to a certain high place and to cast his eyes eastward and westward, and northward and southward, for said the Lord unto him, "All this land which thou seest shall be given to thee, and to thy seed after thee for a possession." Under this law have I been commanded to go to the land of Palestine, and walk through the length and breadth of the land? Never. Have you been commanded to do it? Never. It is not a law that is binding upon us, neither was it binding upon future generations after the days of Abraham.

Again, when God made the promise to Abraham that he should have that land for a possession, and his literal seed after him, he did not mean you nor me, nor the generations of the earth who are not the literal descendants of Abraham.

Again, when God revealed himself to Moses and told him to go down into Egypt and deliver Israel from bondage, that was a law binding upon Moses and Moses alone. The Latter-day Saints are not under that law, neither are any other people. So we might continue to multiply instances by thousands where God spake to individuals, and they, and they alone, were the persons who were to give heed to his laws. Again, where he spoke in some cases to the nation of Israel, Israel, and Israel alone, could obey those laws. But sometimes he would reveal to an individual or to a people certain great moral principles that were binding upon them and upon all people unto the ends of the earth, when they were made manifest unto them. Such laws are everlasting in their nature. Sometimes God revealed ordinances as well as commandments and laws. These ordinances were binding just as far as God revealed them for the people to attend to. For instance, the law of circumcision was binding upon Abraham and his seed, and was to be continued for a certain season, but by and by it was to be superseded by some other. God also revealed, in the days of the introduction of the Gospel, many eternal laws, different from those that had been revealed in former times. He revealed many things afresh and anew when he came personally on the earth, which had also been revealed prior to his day. For instance, we will take the law of faith and repentance. These principles were taught in every dispensation, and were binding upon all people in the four quarters of the earth, and in all generations before Jesus came; they were eternal principles and were to be continued for ever. We will take, again, the law of baptism for the remission of sins. Wherever the gospel was preached this ordinance was binding upon the people. Wherever men were sent forth with the fullness of the plan of salvation to declare to the children of men, the law of baptism accompanied that message, and all people, as well as Israel, were required to obey that sacred ordinance.

In the latter days, when God establishes his kingdom on the earth for the last time, there will be thousands and tens of thousands of precepts and commandments revealed to certain individuals, which will be binding upon them alone. Then there will be other commandments that will be adapted to all the church, and they will be binding upon the church and upon the church alone. Then there will be certain other commandments that will be binding upon all nations, people and tongues, and blessed are they who give heed to the commandments and institutions and ordinances which pertain to them and which are adapted to their circumstances, and which are given for them to obey. But we will return again to the church and kingdom.

Forty-four years have rolled over our heads since God gave commandment to a young man, a youth, to organize baptized believers into a church, which was called the kingdom of God, not organized in its fulness, for there were not

materials enough at that time to institute all the officers that were needed in that kingdom. The kingdom needed inspired apostles, sevens, high priests after the order of Melchizedek; it needed the priesthood of Aaron—the Levitical priesthood, which the ancient prophet said should be restored in the latter days. The kingdom needed all the appendages and blessings of these two priesthoods, and there were not a sufficient number then baptized to make the organization perfect and complete; but so far as there were individuals the organization was commenced, although there were then only six members. Two of these were apostles, called of God to be apostles; called by new revelation to be apostles, called by the ministration of angels to be apostles, ordained by the laying on of hands of immortal personages from the eternal worlds. Hence, being ordained by this high authority, called by this high and holy calling, and chosen to go forth and organize the kingdom, and to preach the message of life and salvation among the children of men, they were obedient; and the other four individuals were organized in connection with them, upon the foundation that had been laid by the Lord himself, and not upon a creed that had been concocted in some council of uninspired men, not upon some articles of faith that were framed by uninspired men to guide and govern them; but what they received was by direct revelation. Not one step was taken without obtaining a revelation in regard to the manner of proceeding in relation to the laying of this foundation.

How very different this from the Methodists, the Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Church of England, and the various societies and denominations that exist throughout all the Protestant world; not one of them was organized in that way! Supposing that some of these Christian denominations should happen to get the form pretty nearly correct, and yet not have the authority, that would make all the difference. The form with the authority is one thing, and the form without the authority and divine appointment and ordination is another thing. One has power, but the other has not; one is recognized by the Lord Almighty, but the other is only recognized by man. I think we can see the difference between man's churches and God's churches, between man's organization and God's organization. In the first place there never were a people, since Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden to the present day, who were acknowledged of God, unless they were founded and directed and counselled by him, unless there were a priesthood having authority from him; unless God spake to them, and sent his angels to them. There never was a people, in any age of the world, whom God recognized as his people, without these characteristics. Says one, "How very uncharitable you Latter-day Saints are! You exclude the whole of us, you do not except one of our churches or good Christian denominations, and there are very good, moral people in them." We do not dispute but what they are a very good, moral people; that is one thing, and a Christian church is another. Morality is good in its place, and it must be in the Christian church. Morality may exist outside of the Christian church, but both can not exist together without God organizing the church.

Perhaps I have spoken sufficiently long upon the subject of the organization of the church. I might enter fully into the investigation of these matters, and give you the particulars about the angels of God who descended from heaven and conferred the authority upon chosen vessels. I might tell you about the day which God set apart and upon which he commanded that his church should be organized, for the very day was mentioned by revelation; I might also relate to you many instructions that were given at that time to all the members of the Kingdom of God. But I have other subjects upon my mind that seem to present themselves before me.

There have been probably scores of revelations given from time to time during the last forty-four years, which are not binding now, neither were they binding upon all the people at the time they were given. For instance, God gave a revelation, through his servant Joseph, on the 14th day of November, 1830, to your humble servant who is now speaking, commanding him to go forth and preach the gospel among the nations of the earth, preparing the way of the Lord for his second coming, and to lift up his voice, both long and loud, and cry repentance to this crooked and perverse generation. I ask this congregation if there is an individual present here, but your humble servant who is under this direct command? No. If you have been commanded to do the same, you have been commanded by a distinct revelation. The revelation given to me was not given to any other individual, and was not binding upon any other. So in regard to the gathering up of the Saints. We were dwelling in the State of New York, and on the second day of January, 1831, God commanded that all the Saints in that State, the State in which the church was organized, and all who were dwelling in all the regions round about, should gather up to the State of Ohio. Is that a commandment binding upon any of this congregation? Not one of them. It was only suited to the circumstances that

then existed, and when fulfilled it was no longer even binding upon them. The Lord gave a commandment after we had gathered up to the land of Kirtland, that some of his servants should go forth, two by two, preaching through Indiana, Ohio, Illinois and Missouri, that they should meet together in general conference on the western boundaries of the State of Missouri, and that the Lord God would reveal unto them the land which should be given unto them for an everlasting inheritance. These persons were commanded to do this. This commandment was binding upon them and them alone. They were the individuals who were commanded to do this work—it was not required of the rest of the church. They fulfilled their appointment—as many as were faithful went through, two by two, on different routes, preaching and calling upon the people to repent and be baptized, confirming them by the water side, and organizing churches. Finally those persons thus commanded assembled in August and September, on the western boundaries of the State of Missouri, in Jackson County. Then the commandment was fulfilled, and it was no longer binding upon those to whom it was given. Thus you see that what is suitable for this month is not always suitable for next month, and what is suitable for to-day is not always suitable for to-morrow. It needs new revelation.

When the missionaries assembled in Jackson County, the Prophet Joseph, being with them, inquired still further, and a commandment was given on that occasion, before the church had gathered, except one small branch, called the Coalsville Branch, and that commandment was to be binding upon all the Latter-day Saints who should gather up to that land. What was it? That all the people who should gather to Jackson County, the land of their inheritance, should consecrate all their property, everything they had—they were to withhold nothing. Their gold and silver, their bedding, household furniture, their wearing apparel and everything they possessed was to be consecrated. That placed the people on a level, for when everything a people has is consecrated they are all equally rich. There is not one poor and another rich, for they all possess nothing. I do not know but you might call that poor; but they have something in common, namely, that which they have consecrated, and this brings me to an item which I happened to think of just about a half a minute before I arose.

I will now read to you what took place on this American continent thirty-six years after the birth of Christ. Jesus appeared here on this continent and organized his church. He chose twelve disciples and commanded them to go and preach the gospel in both the land south and the land north, and they did so. This extract gives us a little information about the repentance of the people.—

"And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another; and they had all things common among them, therefore they were not rich and poor, band and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift."

Now, was not that a marvel? Perhaps you may ask how it was that they were all so easily converted. That would be a very natural question to arise in the minds of many, for they must have been a very different people from those living now-a-days. We have preached, year after year, and have only converted here and there one. But all those millions, inhabiting both North and South America, were converted unto the Lord. Was not that a wonderment? If I explain a little what took place before-hand, it will clear up the wonderment a little.

Just before Christ was crucified in the land of Jerusalem, the people on this land had become exceedingly wicked, and it was foretold to them by their prophets that, when Jesus, their Savior, should be crucified in the land of their fathers, there should be great destruction come upon those who were wicked in this land, and that many of their cities should be destroyed—they should be sunk and burned with fire, and God would visit them in great and terrible judgments if they did not repent and prepare for the coming of their Savior, for they expected him to appear after his resurrection. The wicked did not repent, and all those destructions came, just as the prophets foretold. Darkness covered the face of this land for three days and three nights, while at Jerusalem it was only three hours. Three days and three nights they suffered darkness upon all the face of this land, and very many of their cities, which were great and populous, were sunk, and lakes came up instead of them; a great many were burned with fire, a great many were destroyed by terrible tempests, and a great destruction came upon the wicked portions of the people, who had stoned and put the prophets to death, and only the more righteous portion of the people were spared.

In the latter part of the year in which Jesus was put to death, he descended among a certain portion of the people on this continent, gathered in the northern part of what we term South America. He descended from heaven and stood in their midst; and on the next day, when a larger multitude were gathered together, he came a second time, and there were a great many thousands on that occasion. He often appeared to them after that period, within the course of one or two years, and he chose twelve disciples, and so great was the power made manifest before those thousands that when they went forth into the north and south and preached the word, according to the commandments of God, the more righteous portion of the people, who had been spared, and who had humbled themselves and partially repented, but did not understand the fulness of the gospel, were easily con-

verted, and that is the reason why all the people in North and South America were converted unto the Lord; and in the thirty-sixth year, reckoning from the birth of Jesus, they were not only all converted upon the face of this whole land, but they were all organized upon a common stock principle, and there were no poor among them, and they dealt justly one with another.

Says one, "They did the same thing in the land of Jerusalem." Yes, but they did not keep it up in the land of Palestine—they seem to have failed, for we have no account that this common stock principle, as at first organized, continued among the Saints on the Asiatic Continent. Churches were built up in various parts of Asia and Europe, one in one place, another in another, and they all seem to have had property of their own; and I believe, myself, that they were unprepared, in their scattered condition, to enter into this order of things. There was too much wickedness at Ephesus, in Galatia, at Corinth, and in the various places where small branches were organized, to enter into this common stock principle, and carry it out successfully. But on this continent there was a fine opportunity, for all the people, millions and millions of them, were in the same faith. How easily, then, could they be guided and directed, and put in their property, and organize it as a common stock fund; and they did so, and were exceedingly blessed and prospered in their operation. And I will tell you how long it existed—about one hundred and sixty-five years. But in the year two hundred and one after the birth of Christ the people began to be lifted up, on this continent, in pride and popularity, and began to withdraw their funds from this common stock, and take them into their own hands, and call them their own, and they continued to do this, until the great majority of the people had corrupted themselves and withdrawn from this order. Then, after having broken up this common fund in a great measure, only a few individuals here and there still holding on to it, they became proud and high-minded, and lifted up in their hearts, and looked down upon those who were not so prosperous as themselves, and in this way a distinction of classes was again introduced, and the rich began to persecute the poor; and thus they continued to apostatize, until, about three hundred and thirty-four years after Christ, they began to have great and terrible wars among themselves, which lasted about fifty years, during which millions of them were destroyed. Finally, they became so utterly wicked, so fully ripened for destruction, that one branch of the nation, called the Nephites, gathered their entire people around the hill Cumorah, in the State of New York, in Ontario County; and the Lamanites, the opposite army, gathered by millions in the same region. The two nations were four years in gathering their forces, during which no fighting took place; but at the end of that time, having marshalled all their hosts, the fighting commenced, the Lamanites coming upon the Nephites, and destroying all of them, except a very few, who had previously deserted over to the Lamanites.

Before this decisive battle the Nephites, who had kept records of their nation, written on gold plates, hid them up in the hill Cumorah, where they have lain from that day to this. Mormon committed a few plates to his son Moroni, who was a prophet, and who survived the nation of the Nephites about thirty-six years, and he kept these few plates, while all the balance of them were hid up in that hill; and then, Moroni, being commanded of God, hid up the few plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated.

I make mention of these circumstances for the purpose of showing you that, when people have been once enlightened as the Nephites were, and have had all things common, and have been blessed with an abundance of the riches of the earth, working together in harmony, until riches were poured out upon them in vast abundance, and then withdraw themselves from the order of God, they soon bring swift destruction upon their heads. We see the Nephites, after taking this course, descending lower and lower in their wickedness, going into idolatry, offering up human sacrifices unto their idol gods, and committing every species of abomination that they had ever known or heard of, all because they had been once enlightened and had apostatized from the truth, and withdrawn from the order of God, in which their forefathers had had a long experience.

The Lord gave a caution to the Latter-day Saints, when he told them, in a revelation, given in 1831, to enter into the same order pertaining to our possessions in Jackson County. Prior to that, he gave us a promise, saying, that if we would be faithful we should become the richest of all people; but if we would not be faithful in keeping his commandments, but should become lifted up in the pride of our hearts, we should, perhaps, become like the Nephites of old. "Beware of pride," says the Lord, in one of these revelations, "lest you become like the Nephites of old."

I have no doubt that you Latter-day Saints are the best people on the face of the earth. God has gathered you out from among the nations; you were the only people, to whom the message of life and salvation was sent, who received the missionaries of the Most High when they came to your respective nations. You not only received the gospel of repentance and baptism, but you hearkened to those missionaries and the counsels of God, and gathered to this land. Hence, you have done better than all other people, and you have been blessed above all other people. But there is danger, after having been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and having had the gifts of the Spirit, made manifest more or less according to our faith, if we become lifted up in the pride of our hearts and thence, because we have gathered an abundance of the wealth of this world, that we are a little better than our poor