

SUPPLEMENT TO THE DESERT EVENING NEWS.

SALT LAKE CITY, SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 3, 1869.

DISCOURSE

By Elder GEO. Q. CANNON, delivered at the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, March 25th, 1869.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

The remark is frequently made to the people of Israel when preaching the gospel, that "if their testimony be true, all the rest of the world are cut off from salvation." Because they testify that God has restored the everlasting gospel, has organized His church and bestowed upon men the holy priesthood, and that unless men and women are baptized by men having authority they cannot be saved, they are accused of preaching uncharitable doctrine. But this is no more than the apostles of Jesus were commanded to teach, and no more than is taught by many of the so-called Christian sects. But when the Latter-day Saints testify to this effect it creates considerable excitement, and men and women, who look upon themselves as the elect of God because they have made a profession of Christianity, feel that it is very unsuitable testimony or doctrine to be preached in their hearing. Yet, as I have said, it is not peculiar to us to teach and testify in this manner. The apostles were commanded to go forth and preach the gospel unto all the world saying, "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." This was the message proclaimed by the apostles in the midst of a people who considered themselves the chosen of the Almighty. To them pertained the oracles and the promises. Through their prophets the Lord had spoken, and He had manifested Himself in a miraculous manner in the deliverance of their fathers; and He had promised to their father Abraham that in him and his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed.

I presume that the Jews felt as indignant at the teachings and testimony of the apostles as many do at the present time at the teachings and testimonies of the Latter-day Saint elders. But when the whole of the plan of salvation which has been revealed in these days is understood the people generally will very readily concede that the Latter-day saints entertain a much larger degree of charity than they have been credited with.

I recollect on one occasion preaching to a congregation on the Sandwich Islands, on the first principles of the gospel; I dwelt upon these principles with as much plainness as I was capable of doing, and bore testimony to the people that if they did not receive the gospel they could not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. After I got through, a gentleman in the congregation, with whom I was somewhat acquainted, came and spoke to me in relation to the doctrines I had advanced. He could not dispute that they were scriptural, so far as baptism or being born of the water was concerned, but he thought there was something connected with that statement that was not explained, by which a man might get into the presence of God without first being baptized with water according to the testimony of Jesus. In support of his views he alluded to the case of the thief on the cross, and said to me, "I am an instance of a man who was not baptized, or at least we have no reason to suppose that he was, and yet the Savior said to him 'this day shalt thou be with me in paradise.'" "Now," said he, "Mr. Cannon, how do you reconcile this statement of Jesus with the doctrine you have preached this morning?" I turned to the next book of the New Testament, and pointed out to him the passage which contains the account of the resurrection of Jesus, and his appearance to Mary in the garden.

It seems that Mary, as well as the disciples, was exceedingly anxious about the body of Jesus, and she had repaired to the garden, and on going to the sepulchre she found the body had disappeared. She felt considerable anxiety about this disappearance, and when she turned she saw a personage standing near her, and supposing it to be the gardener, she inquired what they had done with the body of her Lord; but instead of it being the gardener it was Jesus, and when he spoke to her she recognized him, and in her joy she stepped forward with the intention of clasping him, but he told her not to touch him, for said He, I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren and say to them that I ascend to my Father and their Father, to my Father and their God. "Now," said "you can reconcile these two passages as you please." Jesus, after the time he spoke to the thief on the cross, said He had not yet ascended to His Father, but told Mary that He was about to do so. The gentleman was considerably puzzled, and wished me to make explanations in relation to it if I could.

To men who entertain the views that are commonly believed in by Christendom, and especially the Protestant portion of it, there is something irreconcilable in these two passages. The idea which is popular among the Protestants at the present time is that when a person dies he either goes to heaven or to hell. If he be a righteous person he goes into the presence of God the Father or into heaven; if he be an unrighteous person he is consigned to the bottomless pit. The Catholics entertain a somewhat different belief. They believe there is an intermediate state, which is called purgatory, a state where, if the soul be righteous, it experiences joy, but if unrighteous it experiences torment. Therefore this passage, where Jesus says He had not yet ascended to the Father, is not easily understood by the Protestant portion of Christendom; they cannot reconcile it, especially when compared with the other passage in which He says to the thief on the cross "this day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

It is very evident that when Jesus spoke thus to the thief on the cross that He did not mean to convey to him the idea that he would ascend with Him

to the presence of the Father; it is also very evident that there was a principle connected with paradise and with the departure to paradise which Jesus fully understood. We find several passages on record in the New Testament which show with some degree of plainness the work Jesus was engaged in while His body lay asleep in the sepulchre. But these passages were not understood by us nor by any of the inhabitants of the earth until God our Heavenly Father poured out upon His servant Joseph Smith the spirit of revelation to reveal and explain to the inhabitants of the earth that which had long been hidden. It is recorded of a King of the Franks, a barbarian nation who overran Gaul, that he became convinced of the truth of Christianity so-called and after being reasoned with considerably by a Bishop of the Catholic Church, he presented himself for baptism. He seems to have had some curious ideas in relation to the step he was about to take, and before submitting to baptism he propounded a question to the bishop which he wished him to answer. Said he "I have a long line of ancestors who have died in ignorance of this gospel which you teach, and who were never baptized as I am about to be, will you tell me what is to become of them?" The bishop replied very brutally, "they were unbaptized heathens, therefore they have gone to hell." The king replied "then by Thor I will go to hell with them. I will go where my ancestors have gone," and he utterly refused to be baptized and become a Christian.

If the bishop had understood the principles of the gospel and the law of God he would have been able to answer the king very differently from what he did. He would have understood that men and women are judged according to the light they have received, and that, according to the words of Paul, where there is no law there is no transgression; that for transgression to exist and for sin to be attributed to man there must of necessity be a revealed law for them to obey or disobey, that they may be held accountable for their obedience or disobedience. But he did not understand this, neither do thousands of men now who profess to be ministers of Jesus Christ; the latter like the bishop, believe that the thousands and millions of heathen who have died in ignorance of the plan of salvation, and who have never heard the Redeemer's name, go down to hell, there to suffer endless torment. Yet in preaching to their congregations such ministers will extol God as a Being of wondrous mercy and love, whose bowels of compassion are moved in behalf of His erring children, and whose arms are stretched out all the day long to save them from the grasp of the destroyer.

When I have heard such principles enunciated by professed ministers of the gospel I have been surprised that there has not been more infidelity in the world than there is; I have been surprised that men could believe in God at all when He was thus misrepresented to them. What should we think if Congress and the Chief Executive of the nation were to pass a law and affix to that law certain penalties, one of which should be death, and they should never reveal that law to the people of the United States so that they might observe it? Why should we think it barbarous and altogether unreasonable, and any ruler who would act in such a manner would meet with universal execration, and would be considered despoits so absolute as to be unworthy to hold the reins of power. Yet precisely similar ideas are entertained of the Lord God, and they ascribe to Him a course of conduct precisely similar.

Such ideas are entirely incompatible with the real character of God as described to us in the scriptures by those who have known Him best, and as we know Him by our own experience. God is not a Being of this kind. Before requiring His children to obey any law or commandment He first reveals that law or commandment. He points out the path He wishes His creatures to walk in; He sends His messengers who cry to them early and late to repent of their sins, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to be baptized for the remission of their sins that they may receive the Holy Ghost and its gifts; and until people hear this message they are not held accountable by the Almighty for its violation. Hence the command given to the servants of God, to go forth to every nation, kindred, tongue and people to proclaim the message of life and salvation, is as imperative in these days as it was in former times. For this reason the elders of this church have been sent forth to preach to the heathen, and have traveled throughout the United States and Europe, and have visited Asia, and Africa and the islands of the sea, that they might stand as swift witnesses in the day of the Lord Jesus before this generation that they had discharged a duty in proclaiming in plainness and simplicity and in the power of the Holy Ghost, the testimony of Jesus that has been entrusted to them. This was the case in the days of the apostles, for we are told by Paul that the sound of the gospel had gone throughout the earth; as far as the earth was known the inhabitants thereof had heard the sound of the plan of salvation which the disciples of Jesus were authorized by Him to proclaim, and every person that heard that message sounded in his ears was held accountable from that time for his obedience or disobedience to the same; and they who rejected it could not claim the mercy that was extended to those who had never heard it. Jesus proclaimed woe to some of the cities of Judea because of their unbelief after the mighty works performed by Him in their midst. He said it would be far better in the day of judgment for the heathen who did not know anything about Him, His miracles or His message than for them; for as I have said where there is no law there is no transgression, hence the heathen who had never heard of Jesus or the message He brought will be comparatively free from condemnation, for they can not be held accountable for rejecting that which they have not heard. The

cities of Judea and Samaria, and throughout the land of Palestine had been visited by the Savior; He had preached the gospel in their synagogues and public places. He had proclaimed to them that the acceptable year of the Lord had come, and that salvation was extended unto them. He was followed by His disciples, who preached to the inhabitants of that and the surrounding countries, the message of which they were the authorized bearers.

The question naturally arises in the minds of those who reflect on the subject: "What will become of those who die in ignorance of the plan of salvation?" The Lord be praised He has not left His people in ignorance upon these subjects, but has revealed to them in plainness what will become of them in plainness. Through being baptized and entering the church of Christ our minds have become enlarged and our understandings enlightened, and we can comprehend the things of God as we could not previous to obedience. The anxiety in the breasts of people when they join the church, in relation to their parents, children or relations who have died without hearing the gospel, is very natural, and they have inquiries to make about them. The reply of the elders to such questions, is not like that of the bishop to which I have referred; but it is one that imparts comfort and consolation, and that is in accordance with the plan of salvation and with the attributes which we ascribe to our Heavenly Father. Such inquiries learn that their fathers or mothers, or others for whom they are anxious, are not beyond the reach of the gospel of salvation. The work of God is not confined to this little earth of ours; but it embraces within it all the eternities of God. It embraces the work that took place before the earth was created, and it brings within its pale that which will take place thousands of centuries hereafter. The plan of salvation is as broad as eternity, and is as eternal as its Great Author. Your father, mother, friends and relatives, though they have died without the gospel, will yet have the privilege of hearing, if they have not already heard, the principles of life and salvation proclaimed by those who have authority.

There is a place where Jesus, when speaking to the thief on the cross, called paradise. The Savior had not time to tell him then what He would have explained if He had been differently situated. His time was short; He was suffering, dying, but said He, "this day thou shalt be with me in paradise." The thief wanted the Lord to remember him when He came into His kingdom. But He did not promise that; He intimated that in a very little time they would be where the thief might learn the plan of salvation, and how to avail himself of its benefits.

In the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, we are informed that on one occasion he stood up in a synagogue to read, and he opened at the place where Isaiah, in speaking of the mission of the Messiah, says: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." We are told the people wondered at His gracious words. That verse contains a part of the mission assigned to the Messiah. But while He was on the earth He never preached liberty to the captive, except to those that were captive to sin; He never opened the prison doors to the bound, except to those who were in bondage to the power of darkness. But after He left here we are informed by Peter that "He went and preached to the spirits in prison, which some time were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." He went and preached deliverance to these captives, and prepared the way for the prison doors to be opened to them by which they could be unbound and receive the mercy and salvation of God.

Peter, in speaking on this subject, says, further, "For for this cause was the gospel preached to them that are dead; that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." "Preach to them that are dead?" yes; "for this cause is the gospel preached to them that are dead." The heathen, which have died in ignorance of the gospel of Christ, will hear it hereafter in the paradise of God, that they may be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the Spirit. This is a glorious principle. It was perfectly understood by Jesus and His Apostles. Jesus knew He would have opportunity enough to preach to the thief on the cross when He got into paradise; and it also explains the passage which I told you I quoted in reply to the gentleman's question on the Sandwich Islands, in which the Lord says, after receiving His resurrected body, "touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." When the body of the Savior lay in the sepulchre, He, holding the keys, had the right to go and become the pioneer, as it were, in proclaiming the gospel, of which He was the full exponent, unto those who were in prison through disobedience. And doubtless the thief on the cross heard with all the rest and rejoiced in the principles which were taught to him.

There is something beautiful and god-like in a plan of salvation of this kind; it is comprehensive. It shows that the mercy of God is extended to His children, and that He has prepared the way whereby they who die in ignorance of the gospel may receive the benefit thereof. It causes a feeling of rejoicing in the breasts of those who receive the gospel when they find that their parents and ancestors back to the time when the gospel was on the earth, and that they who died in ignorance, are not debarred from its blessings; but can receive, if they will, all the blessings and benefits of that gospel in the due time of the Lord. This principle also explains that saying of Paul in reference to the resurrection, where, in reasoning upon the truth of

that principle, he says: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?" Of what avail would baptism for the dead have been if the dead never rose? But there was a principle there that Paul understood, by which the living Saints could be baptized for their relatives who had died in ignorance of the gospel of Jesus Christ, whether father, mother, brother, sister, child, remote ancestor or friend, whereby they could stand in the stead of that individual, and be baptized or immersed in water for and in their behalf, and then have hands laid upon them for and in their behalf, and have all the ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ performed in their behalf. Though they could not be there themselves in person, yet these individuals who represented them, could render a vicarious offering for them, and render a vicarious obedience for the one who had gone, on the same principle that Jesus, our Lord and Master, did for us all. He acts for us all. He has atoned for us all. He stands in the stead of all the children of men; His atonement and redemption saves all who will be saved from their sins. In like manner can we, each one of us, stand in each other's behalf, in behalf of all those who have gone without the privilege of hearing, while in the flesh, the gospel in its fullness. The son for the father, the daughter for the mother, the grandson for the grandfather, great-grandfather or remote ancestor; the grand-daughter for the grandmother, aunt or remote ancestor or female friend. In this manner each could stand for the other. This principle opens up the way of salvation for all the children of men, from the days when the gospel was on the earth before it. It opens up the way by which every human being who has lived and died in ignorance of this gospel, who has never heard the plan of salvation, who has never known the mode which he or she should adopt in order to receive the blessings of celestial glory—this principle opens up a way by which all such can avail themselves of the blessings of the gospel of Christ and by which they may be rescued from the grasp of the adversary.

But how many Latter-day Saints appreciate these blessings? I recollect the time when the Saints went forward by hundreds and thousands to be baptized for their dead relatives. They went forward and were immersed for them. For the want of a better place, after the permission was given, they were immersed in the waters of the Mississippi, and the feeling was very general in relation to it. There was great anxiety manifested by many to attend to this ordinance. The privilege has been extended in this city. It is known that we have a font prepared for this purpose. But there has been a great lack of interest on the part of the Latter-day Saints of late years, respecting this matter. Such a feeling is unpardonable. It is a privilege every one should seek and embrace. God has blessed us with revelation on these matters; He has made them plain and simple, so that we can understand them. He has borne testimony by the revelations of Jesus Christ to our hearts that this principle is true. And if all the world sneer and cry "delusion," and say it is inconsistent and ridiculous, we know it is true. God has sealed it upon our hearts by the testimony of His Holy Spirit. We know this as we do in revelation to the Holy Ghost, and to the principles of baptism, gathering, tithing or to any other of the duties that devolve upon us. They all come in contact with the traditions of the world; they are directly opposed to their belief; but we know them to be of God, and rejoice in going forth and carrying them into execution.

If it were not for the revelation given on this principle, we should be in a very singular condition; we should be at a loss to know what God would do with those who have died in ignorance of the gospel. We should not know how to reconcile the various parts of the plan of salvation the one with the other. There would be inconsistency connected with it. We might say, as the world say, "Why is it that I am privileged to listen to the servants of God, and in obeying the ordinances of the gospel, while my connections, or many of them, have died without such privileges?" Such reflections would arise in our minds, and we should labor under a great amount of uncertainty and doubt, and we should not feel that confidence in the Lord which we now have. But God has dispelled this doubt and uncertainty, and, in accordance with the predictions of Mr. Elijah, which says: "Behold, I will send the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." He has sent Elijah, the prophet. He has turned the hearts of the fathers toward the children, and the hearts of the children toward the fathers. There is no people on the face of the earth who feel this anxiety about their children that the Latter-day Saints do; and there is no people on the face of the earth who feel the anxiety about their parents and relatives that we do, notwithstanding we may be reminded as I have said. But still with the remission manifested now by us, there is a feeling among us for our kindred that is very strong, and our hearts are turned towards them. But God has revealed the sealing power by which children can be connected with their parents, and so on back until a complete chain is formed to Adam, until the entire human family is connected together in the bonds of the everlasting covenant which God has revealed. In the bonds of that covenant men may be sealed to men, women to men, children to parents until all are bound indissolubly together.

This was the nature of the power conveyed to Peter when it was said to him that whatsoever he should bind on earth should be bound in heaven; and whatsoever he should loose on earth should be loosed in heaven. Now, Peter, as president of that dispensation, had great power given to him. The Savior said unto him

"thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This power he gave to Peter, and that same power and those same keys have been restored with the restoration of the holy priesthood to the earth. Peter, James and John—and mark the consistency of this!—held the keys in the previous dispensation, and they came and laid their hands upon Joseph Smith and gave him that authority which they held. Nobody else could give it legally. It would not have done for Meroni, Alma, John the Baptist or for any other angel or being who had lived in a previous dispensation to have come and laid his hands upon Joseph. John the Baptist could give the keys he held, namely the keys of the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood; he could bestow the power and authority to baptize. Those keys were vested in Joseph Smith, as the head of this dispensation; but it was necessary that Peter, James and John, as the First Presidency of the church of the previous dispensation, should come and lay their hands upon Joseph and seal upon him the authority of the Melchisedec priesthood and apostleship. They conferred this upon him, and by virtue of that authority Joseph Smith was authorized to bind on earth and to bind in heaven, and to loose on earth and to loose in heaven. By the same authority President Young exercises the right, and holds the keys, having received them legitimately from Joseph who held them and who still holds them, but has gone behind the veil. And by that sealing power and those keys, children are sealed to their parents and wives to their husbands for time and all eternity. If they are faithful, and observe their covenants, this sealing will hold good, and will be recognized in heaven as it is on earth.

Those who receive these blessings have them sealed upon them by authority which no man can revoke; but which can be revoked by the transgression and wickedness only of the individual upon whom they are conferred. It is by the same authority that men and women are baptized for the dead; it is by this authority that they have hands laid upon them for the dead. By this authority wives are sealed to their husbands, and by the same authority wives who may have died without receiving the gospel may be sealed to their husbands for time and all eternity.

Thus God has restored to the earth that knowledge which has long been taken away from it. He has restored the everlasting gospel in its fullness, and in the plenitude of its power. He has authorized His servants to officiate in these ordinances, to seal on earth and it is sealed in heaven, and to loose on earth and it is loosed in heaven.

Pretenders may arise and the wicked may array themselves against the kingdom of God, and say these things are not so, and declare that Brigham is a fallen prophet, as they said of Joseph; but the Saints of God are not dismayed. They know there is a power in the holy priesthood, and they know that no power on earth or in hell can deprive the priesthood of the keys and power vested in the man who holds it. We of all people on the face of the earth, have the greatest cause to rejoice in the revelation of this knowledge, and in its plainness and simplicity. It does not come darkly or vaguely; it is so plain, lucid and clear "that a wayfaring man though a fool" need not err respecting it. May God help us, my brethren and sisters, to appreciate our privileges and to live worthy of them, that we may retain the Holy Ghost from this time forward until we are brought back, under the guidance of the holy priesthood, into the presence of our Father and God, which may He grant in the name of Jesus, Amen.

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