

THE DESERET NEWS: WEEKLY.

DISCOURSE

By Elder ORSON PRATT, Sen., delivered in the New Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, June 14, 1868.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

We have assembled ourselves together this afternoon, according to our usual custom, to worship the Lord our God and to partake of the Lord's Supper, in commemoration of the death and sufferings of our Great Redeemer. In this manner we show forth his death until he comes. By attending to this ordinance, and all other ordinances and institutions of the Kingdom of God, we witness before God, before angels and before one another, that we are His disciples.

Jesus is the only name given under Heaven by whom salvation can come. There is no other being or name, no other person appointed, no individual that has received authority to open up the way of salvation to the human family, only our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is he in whom the Latter-day Saints believe; it is he whom we worship. We also worship the Father in his name. It is the gospel which He has revealed which we have received. It is the Holy Ghost which the Father bestows upon the children of men, through His name, by which we are sanctified and made pure in heart.

The gospel of the Son of God is not a doctrine of late invention; but it is an old doctrine—a doctrine that was made manifest in the beginning. It has been taught in every dispensation; and all that were saved in the days of Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, or the prophets, as well as in the days of Christ, and since His day, were saved through belief in the Son of God, and in His gospel. This great plan was revealed to mankind in the early ages of the world as well as in the meridian of time.

The same gospel that was preached by the Apostles, was also preached by the ancient patriarchs and antediluvians. The same gospel that was preached in the days of the apostles is also preached now to the Latter-day Saints. There has been a variety of dispensations of this gospel, made manifest to the human family. We have had in addition to the law of the gospel, many ordinances and institutions given to the children of men, suited to their particular circumstances, and to the conditions in which they were placed.

In the days of Moses, for instance, certain laws and ordinances were revealed from Heaven, suited to the condition of that people. But they had the gospel preached to them before the law of carnal commandments was revealed. Hence Paul says, in his epistle to the Hebrews, the gospel was preached to them as well as unto us, that is, to those who were in the wilderness with Moses. They had the gospel; but it did not profit them, says Paul, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. Hence they had to be dealt with and chastised for their unbelief and rebellion. The Lord had to afflict them, cutting many of them off and swearing in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest.

The gospel was also preached to Abraham. The same gospel by which the heathens were saved in the days of the apostles was known and preached in the days of Abraham. The same gospel that, according to the testimony of the New Testament, brought life and immortality to light was preached before the days of Abraham to Enoch, and through understanding the principles of that gospel his faith in the principles of immortality and eternal life became so strong that he was translated and taken to Heaven without seeing death.

In these latter times the Lord our God has condescended to send a dispensation of His gospel to the human family. You may enquire, what is the purpose the Lord has in view in sending the gospel in this age? Have we not here the books that contain the gospel of the Son of God, as it was preached in ancient times? Have we not here the word of the living God by which the people were saved before and after Christ came? And if they could be saved in those different dispensations in the early ages of the world and in the meridian of time, why should the Lord reveal another dispensation of this same gospel to the human family? I know that these enquiries arise, more or less in the minds of individuals. I have often heard them in traveling

among the various nations of the earth. When the gospel as revealed in the Book of Mormon, has been presented to the people, and they have been told that God has commenced another dispensation of the same gospel, they would immediately enquire "What is the use of it. We have the gospel by which the ancients were saved revealed the New Testament, and why do you bring us another dispensation of it?" Let me reply to this, and say a few words in relation to the object and purposes that our Father in Heaven has had in view in revealing the gospel afresh to the children of men.

If it had not been for the great apostacy after the apostles had preached the gospel, during which the last vestige of the Church of Jesus Christ was rooted out of the earth by the wickedness of the children of men; if it had not been that the priesthood was taken from the earth and the power to preach the everlasting gospel in its fullness had ceased among the nations, I do not know that there would have been any necessity whatever for another revelation of the gospel, and its gifts, blessings and powers, and the priesthood and apostleship in the latter days. But I think it can be proved beyond the power of controversy or reasonable contradiction that the gospel of the Son of God, as it was preached in the days of the apostles has been entirely rooted out from among men. I do not mean the letter of it; we have that in part; but I mean the power to preach it and to administer its ordinances; the power to build up the church and kingdom of God; the power to speak in the name of the Lord; the power which characterized the ancient servants of the living God; the power which rested on the inspired apostles by which they could call upon God and receive revelation from heaven. That power has been rooted out from the earth. A form has been left it is true,—in fact a great many forms; but what is the form without the power? What, for instance, is the use of preaching baptism for the remission of sins, to the human family if there is no person authorized and ordained from God to administer baptism to those who believe and repent? None at all. People might go forth and preach baptism from age to age and from generation to generation, but who could be baptized, or what would be the use of it, unless there were authority to administer the ordinance.

What use would be the Lord's Supper, of which we are now partaking, if we should go and preach it all the days of our lives, provided there were no persons authorized to administer the ordinance? None at all. They could not partake of the ordinance acceptably before God. We could not receive the ordinance of baptism for the remission of sins, unless there were some person sent by new revelation to administer this ordinance to us.

Again, what use would be the ordinance of the laying on of hands in confirmation, as it was performed in the days of the ancient apostles? This is a part of the gospel as well as faith and repentance. What use is it unless there is a man called of God to lay on hands and confirm the gift of the Holy Ghost upon the heads of baptized believers, as was done anciently?

Here is the great question between the Latter-day Saints, and the whole Christian world. It is one of the great fundamental principles at issue between us and the whole world. And it is something of the greatest importance. It is not one of the non-essentials; but it is something that concerns the whole human family, no matter whether they are religious people or irreligious; whether believers in the Bible or unbelievers, or whether they are of this, that or the other sect. This is not the question; but the great question is, has God authority among the nations to preach, to baptize, to administer the sacrament, to confirm by the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, to lay hands on the sick and command them in the name of Jesus Christ to be healed, as they did in ancient days, or has He not? If He has not we may preach until doom's day, and our preaching will not save us in the fulness of the glory of the heavenly worlds. We may baptize and our baptisms will not be recorded in the heavens. We may administer the sacrament, but God will never receive the authority by which it is administered, and it will not be recorded in the behalf of the individuals who received it from unauthorized hands.

What testimony have we that there has been no authority for many generations, or from the days of the ancient apostles until the present century? Have we any evidence in relation to this matter? We are sorry to say that

we have so much that we are obliged to believe that darkness has truly reigned over the inhabitants of the earth, and gross darkness has filled their minds. We will present a little testimony before this assembly, this afternoon, on this subject; but as it is a subject with which you are well acquainted we need not dwell upon it long.

One of the greatest evidences that can be offered that authority to preach the gospel and administer in its ordinances has ceased from the days of the apostles down to the present time, is that which is acknowledged by the whole Christian world, Catholic and Protestant, namely that the days of revelation have ceased, that the canon of Scripture is closed and full.

Now supposing we admit this, for the sake of reasoning a little while on the subject. Admit that after the apostles fell asleep there was no further revelation, that the canon of scripture was closed up at the end of the first century of the Christian era. If we admit this you see the dilemma into which the whole world is plunged. No man can receive the priesthood and authority to administer either in word, in doctrine or in ordinances without new revelation from Heaven. Shall I prove it? Let me refer you to the testimony of Paul in the epistle to the Hebrews, wherein he says that no man taketh this honor to himself except he be called of God as was Aaron. Turn over to the Book of Exodus if you wish to learn how Aaron was called. God, in the first place, by His own voice, and by the ministration of an angel, called His servant Moses, raised him up as a great and mighty prophet, gave him authority from the heaven to administer in the name of the Lord; and then gave him revelation and commandment to call his brother Aaron. God spoke to Moses, on that occasion, and told him that his brother Aaron should be a minister and that he should set apart Aaron unto the Priesthood, and that he should have power to go in and out before the Children of Israel; and that he should wear the breastplate, containing the Urim and Thummim, so that he could enquire in behalf of the Children of Israel, and judge between man and man.

Was Aaron called in any other way but by new revelation through the prophet Moses? He was not. Can any man receive the priesthood only by revelation? Can he receive his calling in any way wherein God does not communicate himself by new revelation from Heaven? I answer no, no. No man can assume the priesthood, and the power thereof, and officiate therein, unless he be called as this man of God was called in the days of Moses.

Admit then that the canon of scripture was closed when John the Revelator received his gospel, after he returned from the Isle of Patmos, and that when the apostles passed from the earth communication between earth and Heaven was closed, who could be their successors? No individual could hold the office or receive it unless God sent new revelation from Heaven, pointing out by name the individual upon whom the authority and calling to preach and administer in His name should rest.

If revelations were given in the second, third, fourth, fifth or any of the following centuries, where are those revelations? They are not in the Bible. Can we find them among the records of the Roman Catholics? No. What do we find there? According to the testimony of their bishops, archbishops and most learned men, they believe in no new revelation; but they take for their guide the traditions and revelations that have been handed down to them. We judge them out of their own mouths. If there have been no revelations given to the Catholic church, as they themselves testify in their writings, then there has been no Pope called to sit in the chair of St. Peter; no bishops nor archbishops to act in the places of the ancient apostles; and they are all impostors. Perhaps I ought to qualify that saying a little. There may have been some of them who were very sincere in following the traditions of their fathers, and who received the priesthood among the Catholics with all the sincerity that characterized some of the heathen priests, in receiving their priesthood from their fathers. But sincerity does not prove authority; and we have their own testimony that all authority was cut off from them, and that there was no man designated by name through revelation to occupy the position of St. Peter in Rome.

Again, come down to about three centuries ago, when the first Reformers came out and began to testify and protest against the Mother Church, and what do they exhibit? We are hunting

for authority. They have invented articles of faith, and these alone are the basis of their authority. As a sample we may take the Church of England in the days of King Henry the Eighth. We may also take the Reformers on the continent of Europe under Martin Luther, Calvin, and various other great Reformers. Men, no doubt, who were sincere and who did much good among the people. But let us hear their testimony. They declare also that the canon of scripture is full. In this respect, they follow in the tracks of the old "Mother." They exclaim, "No revelation, no voice of God; no inspired prophet or apostle; no communications with the heavens, no ministration of angels."

Well then what have you got? Oh, we have the scriptures of the old and New Testament. But the scriptures do not call you to administer in the ordinances of the gospel. The scriptures did not name you, Martin Luther, nor you John Calvin, nor any of you Reformers, as the individuals to go forth to baptize the people and establish the kingdom of God. "Oh, but," says one, "the scriptures tell us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." They do not tell you any such thing. That commission was given to men who lived 1800 years ago. It did not mean Paul, Timothy, Titus or Barnabas, but it meant the eleven men and them only.

"But," says one, "did they not have others to assist them?" Yes, but they did not act by virtue of that commission which Jesus gave to his apostles, just before he ascended to the presence of his Father. That applied to the individuals to whom he spoke, and to no others. Paul could have had no authority to preach or baptize, until the day of his death if God had not given a new revelation to that effect. Timothy never could have acted and baptized, until the day of his death without being ordained by the spirit of prophecy and by the laying on of hands, as we are informed in the New Testament. Barnabas never could have gone forth among the people as an apostle,—for he was an apostle, though not one of the Twelve—and acted in connection with the apostle Paul, unless the Holy Ghost had said "separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work of the ministry unto which I have called them." It required new revelation. And if no man could act even in the days of the apostles on the old commission given to the eleven, how much less can people act upon it who live 1500 or 1800 years after who undertake to pick it up, and say we are authorized to preach under this commission because those eleven men were authorized.

What would you think, Americans,—citizens of this great Republic, if some man in Great Britain should take it into his head to come over here, to this country of ours to represent the inhabitants of Great Britain; and when you ask him for his authority, "Oh," says he, "I have received no new commission. My government did not commission me to come to America to act as Minister Plenipotentiary." We again ask him, by what authority then do you present yourself before this great Republic? You must, of course, pretend to some authority? "Oh, yes," says he, "but I have no new commission, I have an old one given to one of my predecessors,—one given to a man dead and gone. I happened to have access to his writings and papers, and finding his commission I put it into my pocket and came here to act as Minister."

Now would you not think he had left his country because he was insane? Would you acknowledge his authority? No. Would God acknowledge the authority of a man who assumed to act under an old commission given to people who have laid in their graves some eighteen centuries? No. If we act in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in administering the great and sacred ordinance of baptism, we must be commissioned by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost to do this work, or else it would be blasphemy and wickedness in the extreme, not only in those who administer, but in those who suffer themselves to be deceived and receive the ordinance from their hands.

It is a testimony then to us when both the Catholics, and the Protestants in all the various sects, rise up and tell us that the canon of scripture is full and closed, and when they present us with their articles of faith, and say here are sixty-six books in the Old and New Testaments, and you must not receive revelation from God only as it is contained in these sixty-six books. There has been no new revelation since, no new commission, no new authority, no voice of angels, no voice of God, no inspiration, no