

## DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER JOHN TAYLOR,

DELIVERED

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REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

I AM happy to have the opportunity of meeting with the brethren and to talk over the affairs pertaining to the kingdom of God in this Conference. We are engaged in a work in which all of us are interested, individually and collectively. It is a work that differs from anything else that exists at the present time on the face of the earth, and in many respects it differs from anything that ever has existed. I do not know that we are in any wise responsible for this, or for the position in which we find ourselves. The circumstances with which we are surrounded are not, particularly or specially, of our own making, nor the principles in which we believe. We have an abiding faith, as we heard referred to this morning, in certain principles which have emanated from the heavens; and we find ourselves on the earth at this particular time, in this peculiar dispensation, and engaged in a work that is dependent, I was going to say, altogether upon the Almighty, and which is part and parcel of that programme which existed in his mind before the world rolled into existence.

There have been different dispensations existing in the various ages of time, as the purposes of God have rolled on in relation to this earth; all of them, more or less, partook of the same principles that have been revealed unto us, that is so far as the gospel is concerned, but all of them more or less differing.

The first command given to man was to be fruitful, to multiply and replenish the earth; in other words, an earth had been created, and it was necessary, as it had been brought into existence and man placed upon it, that his seed should be propagated, that there might be bodies prepared for spirits to inhabit, that they together might accomplish certain purposes, in the designs of God, pertaining to the creation of the earth.

By and by we find the people departing from the principles of truth, from the laws of the gospel, repudiating the fear of God, grieving his Holy Spirit and incurring his displeasure. Then a flood came and the inhabitants of the world, with the exception of a very few, were swept from it, after the gospel had been preached to all who then lived and all had had an opportunity to believe in and obey it. A few of them did so and lived in the fear of God, and, according to the revelations which we have, they were translated and caught up; they had a separate existence from those who lived upon the earth, and occupied the position of translated beings and were necessarily governed by other laws than the denizens of the earth. This was one peculiarity of the dispensation before the flood. Then came the flood, which many people, unacquainted with things as they existed in the bosom of God and with his purposes and designs, consider was a great cruelty, an act of tyranny, evincing a spirit of outrage and oppression upon the inhabitants of the world. Sceptics reason in this manner sometimes, the only reason of their cavilling being that they do not understand God or his laws and designs in relation to the earth and the inhabitants that live upon it, and being ignorant of these things they are not competent judges as to the fitness of things generally, and the course pursued by the Almighty in relation to the inhabitants of the earth, hence they arrive at all kinds of foolish conclusions. The fact is there were certain ideas connected with the destruction of the world that were good, proper and merciful. Mankind had committed unto them certain powers, among which was the power to perpetuate their own species, of which they could not according to the laws of nature be deprived while living. And they had a certain agency of their own, which they could act upon, and the people who were destroyed in the flood had departed from the laws of God. Man has a dual being, not only a body or mortal tab-

ernacle, but a spirit, and that spirit existed before he came here; and if men before the flood had been allowed to go on in their iniquities and if, with every thought and imagination of their hearts, which were all unlawful and evil, they had been allowed to perpetuate that kind of existence, of course God would have had very little to do with the operations of the earth and the inhabitants thereof, it would therefore have been unjust to the spirits created by our Father in the eternal worlds to force them to come and inhabit the degenerated bodies which they must have received from such characters as the generation drowned in the flood; and hence God took away their agency by destroying them from the face of the earth, because they were prostituting their powers to an improper use and not only injuring themselves by defying the law of God, but also inflicting an evil upon unborn generations by perverting their own existence and by their powers of procreation entailing misery upon millions of spirits that had a just right to look for protection from their Father. The Almighty therefore took this awful method to redress this aggravated wrong and he had a right to do it. Why, our stockraisers act upon that principle a good deal. I was talking to one of them a little while ago who had a large flock of sheep, and he told me that he had got some better stock, and was going to kill off the poor ones in order that he might raise only good stock and a better breed than he then had. I suppose that God had as much right to do this as sheep raisers and cattle raisers have, and thus by cutting off that wicked generation from the earth he deprived them of the privilege of propagating their own species. And what then? Oh, they were all damned. No, they were not quite, yes they were in part and partly not. God understands all these things and manages matters according to the counsel of his will, and hence he provided a way whereby the people who were then drowned, who would not listen to God's law and who had departed entirely from the precepts of Jehovah, might hereafter have a chance of obeying the laws of life and salvation. Well, were they not all totally doomed to go and be roasted in flames for ever and ever. Not quite; for we read that Jesus, when he was put to death in the flesh, was quickened in the spirit, by which he went and preached to the spirits in prison that sometime were disobedient in the days of Noah, when once the long-suffering of God waited upon them in those days. Hence we see that instead of being eternally damned Jesus went to preach the gospel of life and salvation to those whom God, in the days of Noah, swept off by the flood, in order that he might introduce another state of things, and try to raise up a people who would listen to his laws and obey his precepts.

The Scriptures say that Jesus went and preached to the spirits in prison, the same as he had preached to others on the earth. What did he preach? Do the Scriptures say what he came to preach? Yes, they say "he came to preach the gospel to the poor, to bind up the broken hearted, to set at liberty those who were bound, and to open the prison doors to the captive." That is what he came to do, and he did it.

We are not connected with a something that will exist only for a few years, some of the peculiar ideas and dogmas of men, some nice theory of their forming; the principles that we believe in reach back into eternity, they originated with the Gods in the eternal worlds, and they reach forward to the eternities that are to come. We feel that we are operating with God in connection with those who were, with those who are, and with those who are to come.

We find that after the days of Noah an order was introduced called the patriarchal order, in which every man managed his own family affairs, and prominent men among them were kings and priests unto God, and officiated in what is known among us as the priesthood of the Son of God, or the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. Man began again to multiply on the face of the earth, and the heads of families became their kings and priests, that is, the fathers of their own people, and they were more or less under the influence and guidance of the Almighty. We read, for instance, in our revelations pertain-

ing to these matters, of a man called Melchizedek, who was a great high priest. We are told that "there were a great many high priests in his day, and before him and after him;" and these men had communication with God, and were taught of him in relation to their general proceedings, and acknowledged the hand of God in all things with which they were associated. Noah and his descendants, for a length of time, did that which was right in the sight of God to a very great extent, but by and by they departed from his law, and Abraham was raised up as a special agent in the hand of the Almighty to disseminate correct principles among the people, and as a medium through which God would communicate intelligence and blessings to the human family. He went through a very rigid course of discipline, and was tried in almost every possible way, until, finally, he was called upon to offer up his son; and then, when he attempted to do that, and the Lord had fully proved him, the Lord said—"I know that Abraham fears me, that he has not withheld his only son from me, and I know that he will command his children after him to fear my name." After God had tried Abraham he took him on to a mountain and said unto him—"Lift up thine eyes eastward and westward, and southward and northward, for to thee and thy seed after thee will I give this land; and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." That was a great blessing, and it placed Abraham in a most prominent and important position before God, before the people and before the world. Now, although God made that promise unto Abraham, yet Stephen, who lived some two thousand years afterwards, said that "God gave him none inheritance in that land, no not so much as to set his foot on, yet he promised that he would give it to him and to his seed after him." There was a something peculiar about all these men—being in possession of the everlasting priesthood, which is without beginning of days or end of years, they measured things with the eye of the Almighty, by the principle of faith, by the knowledge and intuition which the Spirit of God gave them, and the revelation which it imparted, and they felt like one of old who said—"When a man dies shall he live again? All the days of my life to my appointed time will I wait until the change come." Inspired by the spirit of the living God, in possession of the principles of revelation, holding the keys of the everlasting priesthood, which unlocked the mysteries of the kingdom of God, they looked forward and backward, and felt that they were a part of the great programme which God designed to accomplish in regard to the earth. It was not for the immediate possession of some temporary good; not for the grasping of something that they could hold for the time being that they were anxious; but they were after riches, exaltations, glory and blessings that would continue "while life or thought or being lasts or immortality endures."

From the loins of Abraham a great many great prophets, seers, revelators, men of God, kings, princes and authorities descended; and they raised up a nation that was powerful in its day and generation. But they, like others, finally departed from the laws of God and from the principles of eternal truth, and then the power of the Melchizedek priesthood was withdrawn from them, and the law was added because of transgression, and although they became a numerous, great, wealthy, wise and intelligent people, yet they lost for a long time the power, intelligence, life and light of revelation which the gospel imparts.

Then came the time when Jesus appeared on the earth. He was "a lamb slain from before the foundation of the world," and he came to accomplish things which had been planned by the Almighty before the world was. He was the being to whom the antediluvians, and Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob, and the prophets, patriarchs and those who were filled with the Spirit of God and the light of revelation referred to and to whom they looked; to him pointed all their sacrifices and the shedding of the blood of bulls and goats, heifers, lambs &c. Jesus introduced the gospel, and if the people would have received and obeyed the principles which he taught the kingdom of God would have been established, the

dispensation of the fulness of times brought in, and in the temple at Jerusalem the baptisms for the dead would have gone on and the redemption of the living and the dead would have proceeded. But the people could not receive the teachings of Jesus. Here was a dispensation different from any of the others.

There was an Elias to come, who was to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children; and when it was asked Jesus—"Art thou the Elias which was to come or do we look for another?" it was told them, "This is he if ye can receive it." But they could not, and consequently they beheaded John the Baptist and crucified Jesus, and it was declared that not one stone of their magnificent temple should be left upon another without being thrown down, which was literally fulfilled, and the ground upon which it stood was ploughed over. Jesus told his disciples that when they saw "Jerusalem encompassed about with armies they were to flee to the mountains." One of the prophets, in speaking of the affairs that were then to take place, said that a certain power should arise which should make war with and prevail against the Saints, and that that power should seek to change the times and the laws, and that they should be given into his hands for a time, and times and the dividing of times. Very well, these things have taken place.

We now turn our attention to this continent, and find that God transplanted a people who were of the seed of Abraham, from Palestine to this continent. Here they passed through all kinds of vicissitudes and changes, sometimes abounding in iniquity and vice, at other times full of virtue; sometimes they acknowledged the hand of God and at other times disregarded it; sometimes they were chastened by the Almighty and at other times permitted to go on in their iniquities. At one time there was a people on this continent who lived for nearly two hundred years in the fear of God, under the direction of his spirit, governed by the laws of the gospel, and they had all things common among them, and we are informed that there never was a more united, happy and prosperous people upon the face of the earth.

These are some of the changes that have taken place here. And now, we are living in another age and under other circumstances. The world is waxing old; myriads of people have lived upon it, generation after generation have come and gone, some good, some bad, some very wicked, some very righteous; some pure and holy, others to the contrary, embracing every kind, and all the peculiar phases that have been developed by the human family. They have come into existence and they have died, and what of them? What of the good and what of the bad? What of the righteous and what of the unrighteous? What of their standing before God, and what of the nations that have existed, that do exist and that will exist? These are things, which, as intelligent, immortal beings, demand our consideration. And what of us as part of them? We need to reflect, and it is proper that we should understand something in relation to these things. We have our part to perform. We find ourselves in the world in this day and age, which is that which was spoken of by Paul—"the dispensation of the fulness of times, when God would gather together all things in one, whether they be things in the heavens or things on the earth." There is something very remarkable, very peculiar in that expression. What the gathering is in the heavens it is not for us to say at the present time; what the gathering is on the earth we have some little idea of from the things with which we are associated. There is a peculiarity about it. As I said before, we find ourselves living in this day, and we are called upon to perform a certain work in connection with the economy and designs of God pertaining to the earth we live on, pertaining to ourselves, to our progenitors and to the whole human family that have existed upon the face of the earth. We are here to do a certain work which God has set us to do, and, as I have said, we have had very little to do in bringing about the matter. We did not originate it. We talk sometimes about Joseph Smith, he did not originate it. He told us about a great

many things that we talk about, and unfolded many principles unto us. But how did he know them? God called him and set him apart as he called Noah in his day, and as he called Enoch, Abraham and Moses in their day, and as he called the Prophets and Jesus in their day, as he called Nephi, Lehi, Mormon and Alma in their day upon this continent. He has called us, and has introduced to our view certain principles, and we have been learning these principles gradually. The first thing was to get baptized, a very simple affair, a very little thing, nevertheless it was an ordinance of God, he appointed it, and we went and were baptized. Then we had hands laid upon us for the reception of the Holy Ghost, and we partook more or less of its influence, according to our faithfulness and diligence in keeping the commandments of God.

We had not anything to do with originating this work; neither had Joseph Smith, neither had Oliver Cowdery, nor Brigham Young, nor any of the Twelve, nor the first Council, nor the bishops, nor any other man living. God has his work to perform, and at the proper time and in his own way he will fulfill his own purposes and build up his kingdom. He commenced it at his own time, and he called Joseph Smith and gave him revelation. He told him about the ancient history of the people of this continent and enabled him to translate it, he gave him a key to all these things. He could not have done it without any more than you or I could. He was indebted to God, just as much as you and I are, and so were his brethren who were with him. Joseph Smith had many revelations, but who gave them to him, by what spirit and intelligence were they unfolded and communicated to his mind? God revealed them to him, he obeyed the behests of Jehovah. When God called him and set him apart he was obedient, just the same as you and I were. When the elders of Israel came forth to preach the everlasting Gospel we obeyed it and, through obedience, we obtained the Spirit of God, and that brought us into the position which we occupy at the present time.

And now about the gathering, who understood anything about it? The ancient prophets prophesied about it, but what did we know about it, or what do the world today know about it? Nothing, only as it has been revealed. If God had not revealed it we should have been as ignorant as the rest of mankind are. And so we should about our sealings, and the covenants that men and women make with one another, that the fools around us do not comprehend; they think we are fools, but we know they are; that is the difference between us. We know they are ignorant, brutish, foolish and know not God nor his laws, nor the principles of truth; but we know something about these things, because God has revealed them to us.

We heard this morning that this was a time in which to build temples, and you know that we are now engaged in a work of that kind. Why are we thus engaged? Is it for our sakes only? God forbid. The gospel that we preach is not for ourselves only. We have not preached it these many years that we might make money by it. I have travelled a great many thousands of miles to preach this gospel without purse and scrip, and I see many men around and before me who have done the same thing. Was it for ourselves? No. Was it because it was pleasant? No, but God had revealed certain principles to us pertaining to the salvation of the world in which we live; he had committed a dispensation of the gospel to us, and it was woe unto us if we preached not that gospel, whether we liked it or not. But we did like it, and we went forth in the name of Israel's God, and God went with us and sanctioned our testimony by his Spirit, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost. We could not have done these things or I will acknowledge that I could not, neither could any of my brethren, unless God had been with us, we had not sufficient faith and intelligence; but God imparted his Spirit, his intelligence and the gift of the Holy Ghost to the elders of Israel, and they went forth bearing precious seed, the seed of eternal life, and they came again rejoicing and bringing their sheaves with them, and here they are gathered into the garner. What for? For ourselves? No, we are, or ought to