

RELIGIOUS.

Sunday Services.

Religious services were held at the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Sunday, May 18th, 1890, commencing at 2 p.m., Elder Henry P. Richards presiding.

The choir and congregation sang the hymn commencing:

Now let us rejoice in the day of salvation,
No longer as strangers on earth need we roam.

Prayer was offered by Elder Edward Stevenson.

The choir sang the hymn:

How great the wisdom and the love,
That filled the courts on high.

The Priesthood of the Twenty-second Ward officiated in the administration of the Sacrament.

BISHOP ORSON F. WHITNEY

was called upon to address the congregation. I believe it is seventy years this spring, he said, since Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the latter days, received his first visitation from on high. According to the account that we have, it was just such a beautiful spring morning as that which dawned today upon the world when this young boy went out into the woods near his home, in the State of New York, to ask, in order that he might receive, wisdom from the Lord in regard to his soul's salvation. Although the world was full of religious opinions, notions and beliefs, the aspect presented by the Christian sects to the mind of this youth was not of a prepossessing character. It was a chaos of religious opinions, some claiming one thing and some another, one priest saying, "Lo! here is Christ," and another, "Lo! here is Christ;" one preacher, basing his belief upon the Bible, claiming that baptism was essential to salvation, and another, basing his belief upon the same book, claiming that it was not essential; one preacher holding that baptism by sprinkling was the proper mode, while another advocated baptism by pouring. The heavens were closed—so the Christian world taught and believed—and God no longer spake to man; the visitation of angels to the earth was a thing of the past, not to be thought of or expected in this age, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the working of miracles, and the signs that were promised to follow believers anciently were all done away with, as being no longer necessary.

This, in brief, was the condition of the world—a chaos, a Babel of religious opinions when Joseph Smith, a boy of only fourteen or fifteen years of age, went into the woods and asked of God which of all these religions was the true one. It had not occurred to him up to that time but what one of them was true. He knew that there were many thousands of devout and honest worshippers in the various sects, and that so far as they believed in the Bible, many of them were sincere and earnest in their belief. He did not regard them all as hypocrites; for this would have been an unjust view to take. But he could

not decide for himself which was the true religion, and he knew that they could not all be from God, because they opposed each other and were full of discord and dissension. He had read in the sacred scriptures, which had been given, he believed, to make men wise unto salvation, the words of the Apostle James, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." "Never," said he, "did words come with more force to the mind of man than these came to mine; for I thought that if any man needed wisdom at that particular time it was myself." So he went out into the woods and bowed down in humility before the Lord, and asked Him, in all earnestness, which of all the denominations of the day was the Church of Christ.

He declared that soon after he began praying there fell upon him a power which he could not comprehend, which filled him with darkness and horror, and tied his tongue so that he could no longer pray orally. But he continued to beseech the Lord, and when he could no longer pray with his tongue, he prayed in his heart and mind, and asked God to deliver him. He would not relinquish the object which he had in view, although the spirit of darkness which had fallen upon him strove to crush and overpower him. Just as he was about to be overcome he saw a light descending from heaven, until it rested, as it were, upon the tree tops just above his head. In the midst of this pillar of light, which he describes as being brighter than the sun at noonday, he saw two glorious personages in the form of man, and one of them, pointing to the other and addressing Joseph said, "This is my beloved Son, hear Him."

As soon as he could collect himself Joseph asked of these Personages what he desired to know—which of all the Christian churches was the true Church of Christ. To his astonishment he was told that none of them were; that while there were many souls who were devout and sincere, and living up to the light that was within them, those churches which claimed that God was not a God of miracles, that He would no longer communicate with man by heavenly visitations, but had delegated to colleges and institutions of learning the power and authority to equip His ministers and send them out into the world to act in His name, instead of receiving from Himself the authority of the Holy Priesthood, which holds the keys to minister in the name of God; that that all those churches which held these opinions and opposed each other, and were at war with one another in their ideas and practices, that they and their hypocrisies were an abomination in the eyes of God. He was further informed that the true Church was about to be restored to the earth, having been taken away from it hundreds of years before, after the Apostles fell asleep and the true servants of God were persecuted, cast

out and slain, in fulfillment of the predictions of the Prophets and Apostles, and of the Savior Himself. Joseph was told that a new dispensation was about to open, and that he had been chosen as an instrument in the hands of God to begin a great and a marvelous work in the midst of mankind, a work having as its object the preparing of the world for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in His glory.

When the vision departed and the young boy came to himself, he found that he was lying upon his back gazing up into heaven. He knew that he had seen the Father and the Son, and had received a vision from God. Supposing that those around him would rejoice equally with him because of the great things he had to tell, he began to speak of his wonderful visitation. He made a confident of a minister—or professing minister—of the gospel, who had shown him some kindness and taken some interest in his welfare. But what was his surprise when this man, instead of rejoicing at the tidings of the marvelous manifestation which this humble and pure-minded boy had received—even as Samuel of old had received the word of the Lord—told him that it was a delusion and a snare, that God no longer spoke to man, that the preachers of the day were his ministers and that there was no longer any necessity for angels to visit the earth, because the people were living in the full blaze of gospel light, in the nineteenth century, an era of learning, power, wisdom and civilization.

But did this convince Joseph Smith that he had not received a visitation from the Lord? No. He could not deny it though ten thousand ministers chose to doubt it. Said he, "I knew that I had received a vision, and I knew that God knew it, and that I would be condemned if I should deny what my eyes had beheld." This was the testimony which he bore to those around him.

But the same fate befel him that has usually befallen men in every age when they have come in contact with the preconceived ideas and notions of their generation—when they have resolved to believe for themselves and not be misguided by the uninspired and erroneous teachings of others. He began to suffer slander, abuse and persecution, and was neglected, ignored and slighted by those who should have been his best friends. Wandering into bye-paths, giving way to the weaknesses of youth, because forsaken by his monitors and guides, and being persecuted by the more respectable portions of society, he confessed in the honesty of his heart that he did many things which were sinful in the sight of God. But he repented, and some time later bowed himself down before the Lord and besought Him earnestly, and with tears in his eyes, that He would overlook his youthful follies, receive him again into His favor, and give him a manifestation that he might know, whether or not he was still acceptable and would be forgiven.