

DISCOURSE

BY

PREST. GEORGE Q. CANNON,

In the 14th Ward Meeting House,
Sunday Evening, July 25, 1880.

REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

*Office of the Holy Spirit—Equality
Produced by the Gospel—The Evil
of Class Distinctions—Danger of
Worldly-Mindedness—Riches
alone not Productive of True
Happiness—A Contrite Heart
Necessary—Should be an Increase
of Spiritual Gifts—Word of Wis-
dom—The Return to Jackson
County.*

While I was sitting here there was a portion of the record of Alma suggested itself to my mind, which I will read, as found recorded in the 4th chapter of the Book of Alma (new edition).

[The speaker then read the greater portion of the 4th chap.] Continuing he said:

I should not attempt to get on my feet to speak to you my own thoughts, or my own feelings, or that which my own spirit would suggest. I have had sufficient experience in my life to know that for a man to impart profitable instruction unto his fellow creatures in the capacity of a teacher of the things of God, he must have the aid of the Spirit of God. Without that he cannot impart that which will be of permanent profit to any one. I know it is the privilege of a people situated as we are to know the mind and will of the Lord concerning us, and also when we come into an assemblage of this character to receive the instruction that is adapted to the circumstances of each particular individual, and that is the office of the spirit. I cannot tell your feelings, I do not know your hearts. There may be secret sorrows, there may be griefs, there may be doubts, there may be many things that oppress you in your feelings, of which I am entirely ignorant. But the Spirit knoweth the things of God. God knoweth our hearts and His all-piercing eye can penetrate the inmost recesses of our hearts, and every thought, every secret is known to Him, and He can, through the aid of His Holy Spirit, impart to each one that portion of strength, of comfort, of light which each soul may need to strengthen it on its onward journey in the path which God our Father has marked out for us to pursue, and unless a meeting of this kind is attended, with these effects, to me it is exceedingly unsatisfactory. When I go as a listener, I desire to go to meeting to be fed, to go away from the meeting with a feeling that I have received that which will be a benefit to me in my life, in the acts of my life, and so also if I speak.

The position of the Latter-day Saints in this respect is different from that of every other people that I know of on the face of the earth. We profess to serve God. We profess to have received from Him blessings as the result of our obedience to His commandments. We profess to live by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God, and we believe that this is a time when God speaks in various ways to His children, manifesting His mind and will to them, and that it is not with us as with other people who are dependent upon that which is written, dependent upon the Bible for the food and nutriment necessary to strengthen them. We depend upon the revelations of God to us. In this respect our position is different from that of every other people that I am acquainted with, and of course, this being our position, it is of the utmost importance to carry out the principles that we believe in, that we should live in such a manner as to have the mind and will of the Lord made manifest to us. How is this mind and will communicated? By what means is the mind and will of the Father made manifest unto the children of men? There are various ways. One is He has placed in His Church officers whose duty it is to instruct the Church. Yet this does not relieve the members of the Church from their responsibility. It is for the members of the Church also to so live that when they are taught and counseled, when instruction is given unto them, that they shall be able to know whether that instruction and counsel be from God or not. This is the privilege of

every individual, and there is no person, however humble, who is a member of the Church, who should be destitute of this spirit of which I speak, this light and this intelligence. God our Eternal Father is the Father of us all. The relationship which exists between us and Him is not confined to a small portion of the human family, but it is the same with all of us; every individual that is within the walls of this house to-night occupies I may say precisely the same relationship to our Father in one sense. Not that all have the same responsibility, not that all are required to perform the same duties; but all occupy the same position of children, and our Father in heaven is our father, the Being whom we worship. As God is the father of us all, we trace our descent from Him, our children trace their descent from Him, they are as much His children as we are His children, and I often think in my association with my own children that I would just as soon hurt the feelings of a grown person as I would one of my children. I think in one respect they are my equal, though I occupy the relationship of father to them; and so I feel towards all. Now, the gospel produces this sense of equality. There could be no slavery where the gospel is taught in its fullness and in its perfection. There could be no distinction where the gospel is practised. You read here—or rather I have read for you—in this record that has come down to us, that when the principles of the gospel were practised among the people of this land, they were equal to a very great extent; but when they began to violate the principles of the gospel, their inequality manifested itself. Some were lifted up in pride, some looked with scorn upon their poor brethren and sisters. Classifications arose in society, which had their origin not in virtue, not in holiness, not in purity, not in any superiority arising from intelligence, but because some were richer than others, some could dress better than others, some could have better surroundings than others, doubtless dwelt in finer houses, better furnished, and they wore better clad, and had probably finer and nicer food. Distinctions of this kind grew up not out of the gospel, but out of the violation of the principles of the gospel. Wherever the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is taught, it produces, as I have said, this sense of equality, it makes the man who may know and understand the things of God feel that he is no better than his fellow man, and the man who understands the things of God feel that she is no better than her sister. If this sentiment was practiced among us it would produce the results we find that Alma sought to produce among the people, and which he did produce by the preaching of the word, as recorded in the subsequent verses to those which I read. He went forth preaching the word as he found it the most effectual means, as described by the historian, of checking the evils that were growing among the people. It would be so among us in a while if it were not for the preaching of the word of God, and with the preaching of the word, with all the faith, all the zeal, and all the power which our leaders are capable of exercising, it needs it all to repress these inclinations and these tendencies. There is something in the human heart of that character that when human beings are prospering they are apt to be lifted up in pride and to forget the cause or the source of their prosperity; they are apt to forget God, who is the fountain of all their blessings and to give glory to themselves. It requires a constant preaching of the word of God, a constant pleading with the people, a constant outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the people to bring them to a true sense of their real condition. With all the experience the Latter-day Saints have had, who is there among us that cannot perceive this tendency? Why, it is constantly bringing itself into notice. It becomes in some instances quite offensive, because those who are humble feel the effects of it. Those who are poor, needy and destitute, not gifted with ability to accumulate the things of this world, feel it, and very frequently their hearts are grieved because of it. There is this tendency we have to contend with as a people and as individuals, and it is something we should constantly bear in mind, that God has sent us here and given unto us a mission on the earth, not to accumulate riches, not to become worldly minded, not to pile up

the things of this world which are perishable to the injury of ourselves or to our detriment in our progress in the things of the kingdom of God. Is it right that we should take care of ourselves as a people and as individuals? Certainly. Is it right that we should be prudent, that we should take care of those gifts and blessings which God has given unto us, that we should husband our resources, that we should be economical, and not extravagant? Certainly; this is right, this is proper; we would be culpable if we were not so. But with this there is also something else required, and that is, to keep constantly in view that the management and care of these things is not the object that God had in sending us here, that is not the object of our probation. God has shown unto this people repeatedly—and there is scarcely an individual member of the Church that has not had experience in it—that He can give and He can take away. I have in my mind now many instances where men of wealth—comparatively wealthy at least—have joined this Church; and it seemed as though there was a succession of events after they joined the Church, to deprive them of all they had, to test their faith apparently, but to show them that God did not give men means for the purpose of placing their affections upon them, and then, after they were stripped, He has, in many instances, began to bless them again, and allowed them to have means in greater abundance than ever they had before. He has done so with this people. We have been stripped of our property, reduced to the last extremity for food and for other necessary comforts, and yet God has multiplied upon us those blessings when He has sent us food, and we have had abundance. But the happiness of a people does not consist in the abundance of worldly things, that is, the abundance of food or of raiment, or of houses, carriages, horses, and costly apparel. It is true that if we are relieved from the pressure of want, if we have the wherewith to supply our necessities, we feel better, we feel a relief that we do not feel when ground down by poverty. But happiness is not entirely dependent upon these circumstances, as doubtless many of my brethren and sisters have proved. I have proved myself to my entire satisfaction. I have been in reduced circumstances; been on missions when I did not know where to get a mouthful to eat; turned away by the people who dare not entertain me because of the anger that was kindled against us. I could stand by and weep, being a boy and away from all my friends. But I, nevertheless, was happy. I never enjoyed myself in my life as I did then. I know that happiness does not consist in the possession of worldly things. Still it is a great relief when people can have the means necessary for the support of themselves and families. If they possess these things and the spirit of God with them, they are blessed. But the Lord requires of us different things in this day to what He did in ancient days. I often think of it.

There is a great deal of inequality among us as a people, not so great as described by the writer in the book of Alma, but still there is a great deal of inequality among us, a great deal of pride and more disunion than there should be. This people are not united as they should be. There are many things existing among us that should be uprooted and not have an existence in our midst. And what is the reason that these things exist? The reason is to be found in our neglect of the principles we have espoused. The Lord requires all His people in these days to bring unto Him a sacrifice. In olden times, before the coming of the Lord Jesus, we read in the Bible that the people brought their offerings of oxen, of sheep, of fowls of various kinds. These were burnt offerings, they were sacrifices, the blood of animals flowed, and the sins of the people apparently were remitted by their obedience to these requirements. But the Lord has said respecting us that the offering He requires at our hands is a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Let me ask you—and in asking you—I ask myself—do you, when you go unto the Lord bring this offering, or do you go to God without asking Him in this spirit and in this manner? If you go to the Lord with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, He will show to you all your faults, and all your weaknesses, He will bring plainly before you wherein you have come short in doing His will, and when you see yourself in the

light of that spirit instead of being filled with pride, you will feel to abase yourselves and bring yourselves down in the very dust of humility; your own unworthiness will be so plain before you, that if pride should come into your heart at any time, you will almost be shocked at it and you will feel to put it away from you. It is in this way that we as Latter-day Saints should live. There is enough taught to us in the Bible, in the Book of Mormon, in Doctrine and Covenants, and by our leaders from time to time, to lead us into the presence of God Our Heavenly Father. We should be the most humble people on the face of the earth. Why? Because God in communicating to us the knowledge of our weakness and faults, will give us humility. We should be the most thankful people upon the earth. Why? Because owing to the abundance of God's goodness and mercy to us, and realizing it as we should do, it will fill us with a thankfulness that words could not express; our hearts would overflow with extreme thankfulness to the Lord our God for the blessings that we enjoy. Under these circumstances should there be any murmuring? Not any. Should we find fault with our condition and our circumstances? Certainly not, if we are living the religion that God has revealed to us. Should there be any quarrelling or fault finding? No; because where the Spirit of God exists there is no disposition of this character. There is a disposition to suffer wrong rather than to do wrong; not to revile, not to persecute, not to assail back when we are assailed. If a brother comes up to me, he is in a bad temper, he says something that is annoying, and I lose my temper and reply in the same spirit, do I do right? Certainly not. However much the provocation may be it is not my duty as a Latter-day Saint, as a professed follower of Jesus Christ, to indulge in any such feeling or expression. Well, but one may ask, have we to submit to abuse? Yes, that is one of the requirements of the Gospel, that you shall submit to abuse. Have we to submit to wrong? Yes, if somebody attempts to wrong you, it is your duty as professed followers of Jesus Christ to submit to that. Supposing I am struck, must I submit to a blow? Yes, I must or else I am not carrying out the principles of my religion. Well, but suppose a person tells falsehoods concerning me, assails me and reviles me, must I submit to this? Yes, Why? Because the requirements of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ are that we should do so, that we should not quarrel, that we should suffer evil and wrong and pray for the person who does these things to us. This is a hard lesson I know. Some men would think their children cowards unless they would fight when they were struck. They teach their children to strike back when struck, to resent attacks upon them. Then, again, if one man called another a liar the first thing we know the man is knocked down, and as a result of training he would be considered unmanly if he did not resent the insult in this way. I am very glad, however, that a change has taken place in this respect. There must be changes of this kind among us. If a man forgets himself so far as to call his brother a liar, or any other offensive name, there should be enough of the Spirit of God and the spirit of patience and the spirit of self respect left in the brother to bear the insult without resenting in the same spirit. Would this make us pusillanimous? Would this make us a people devoid of spirit? Certainly not; there is plenty of room for the exercising of all the spirit we have in coping with the difficulties we have in life without exercising it in that manner, without expending it in senseless quarrels. If we have this spirit to which I have alluded, this meek, humble, broken and contrite spirit, will it not produce union? Yes, it will, it will produce union and love, and I wish to say to all who are here to-night that it is the duty of every man and woman in this Church to live at peace with him and herself and then to live at peace with everybody else, husbands with wives, wives with husbands, parents with children, children with parents, brothers with sisters and sisters with brothers; this is the duty that God requires at our hands. I am speaking now of something that is not an abstract theory that cannot be carried out; I am speaking of that which can be carried out, which every one of us can carry out, and of results that can be accomplished in the midst of this people.

The feeling has grown upon me, and is growing upon me every day, that as a people we do not live up to our privileges. We do not have the knowledge of the things of God that we should have. There is not that amount of revelation enjoyed by us that there should be. The gifts of the spirit are not manifest to the extent they should be. Is there revelation? Yes, I know that and can testify of it. Are there gifts, are there blessings enjoyed by the people? Yes, I am convinced of it. Are there manifestations of the goodness and the power of God among the people? I am satisfied that there are manifestations of this kind. The sick are healed. The mind and will of the Lord is communicated to the people, but it is not to that extent that it should be considering our circumstances, and considering the length of time the Church has been organized. Who is there that is not conscious of this. Ask yourselves, each of you, "Have I the knowledge of the things of God that I should have? Does the Spirit of God bear testimony to me and warn me and teach me as it should do?" Let each one ask himself and himself this question. Now, if we should there is no event of any importance that could occur but we would have some intimation respecting; we would be prepared for it, we would be prepared for every public event that affected us, every private event, everything of this character that could occur to us that would affect us in the least degree would be known by us at the very time. The spirit of God with its monitoring would say to us, "If you pursue this path there is danger, you may lose your life, you may meet with an accident." Mothers would have teachings of the spirit respecting their children and how to take care of them, and fathers also respecting their families. I am not talking about something that is entirely beyond our reach and is impossible for us to receive. I am speaking something which is within the reach of all of us to a greater or less extent. Some are gifted in one direction and some in another. But who belong to this Church and have taken the course which God has pointed out, and have humbled themselves in obedience to the commandments of God, and endeavored to carry out these commandments have this promise made unto them that they will be taught of the Lord.

If there is one desire that I have as an individual greater than another, it is that I may so live as to have the blessing, and next to you, this Church, this people, so live as to have the same. I do not have those gifts unless somebody else had them, for I learned in my life that when man is blessed more than his fellow temptation comes in, pride comes and the adversary is apt to say to him that he is so much better than his fellowmen. Therefore I wanted to have any great gift the Lord I never have felt—I do not think I ever shall, I could will not with my present state of feeling—to have these myself, would like somebody else to have them also. I would not want to be the richest man in the community, I would not want to be the most gifted, the most prominent or most honored in any respect, I would want others to share in the blessings. Then I would have fear concerning the effect of it upon myself. When I am blessed I want to see the Latter-day Saints blessed, I want to see the people of God receive the gifts of God and enjoy them so that we shall all increase and develop together.

I noticed when I was very young in the Church that men who were greatly gifted of the Lord and had many manifestations, were the most apostatized; with the exception of the Prophet Joseph Smith every one was overthrown. I suppose the reason of it was that they were lifted up in pride and the adversary to take advantage of them. I would like well to see these gifts and blessings multiplied among us and upon us, that a people we should have dreams, visions and manifestations of the Spirit; but there is one thing we have all got to be very careful about and that is this: I have seen Elders in my experience that they got their own spirit very much they imagined that it was the Spirit of God, and it was difficult in some instances to tell the difference between the suggestions of their own spirit and the voice of the spirit of God. This is a great itself, to be able to distinguish which suggests itself to our hearts and that which comes from