

## DISCOURSE

By Elder ORSON PRATT, delivered in the Fourteenth Ward Assembly Rooms, Salt Lake City, Sunday afternoon, March 18, 1873.

REPORTED BY D. W. EVANS.

It is usual to open most of our meetings by singing and prayer, but I do not know that we have any special revelation that directs this peculiar kind of commencement. We find our Savior, in his travels among the people, sometimes commencing to address them without rising from his seat or having any vocal prayer. Sometimes he would get on board a vessel and would address the people who were on shore. I have sometimes been afraid lest we as a people might run into forms and have them so continually before our minds that we should feel, if we happened to deviate from them, that we were transgressing the commandments of God. It is very necessary for us to comply with any forms that God has commanded, and we should strictly observe any ordinances, institutions or laws that he has revealed. For instance, we will refer to the sacrament of the Lord's supper. He has given strict commandments that we should partake of these symbols of his crucified body and shed blood, to witness unto the Father that we remember the great atonement that he has wrought out, and the sufferings and death of his Son. This is a very sacred and holy ordinance which the Lord has instituted, and if we were to neglect it and think that we could get along just as well without attending to it, we should come under condemnation. It is so with regard to baptism—if we were to tell the people that they could obtain remission of sins without obeying that ordinance, we should come under condemnation.

We do not believe in the forms and ceremonies instituted by men, in all respects, although many of them are good; yet if we do not conform to them in all points we do not feel under condemnation. Jesus said to Nicodemus that except a man be born of the water and of the Spirit he can in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. There are many people at the present day who do not consider that the birth of the water is particularly necessary, but they consider the birth of the Spirit of all importance, and that no person can enter heaven without it. We, the Latter-day Saints, believe that unless a person is born both of the water and of the Spirit he has no claim upon the promise of the Almighty that he shall enter there; indeed the Savior declared that men should in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven unless they were born of the water and of the Spirit. What I understand by the birth of the water is an immersion in the water and coming forth therefrom.

If Jesus, or our heavenly Father, had instituted any other form it would be necessary for us to attend thereunto in order to obtain the blessing. If he had told us that we should obtain remission of sins by our repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, and by being immersed seven times in water, that way, and no other, would be necessary; or if he had told us to be immersed twenty times, that would be the way, nineteen times would not answer. When the Assyrian leper came to the Prophet Elisha and desired to be healed of his leprosy, the Prophet, under the direction of the Spirit of God, commanded him to go and dip seven times in Jordan and he should be healed. This afflicted person was about to turn away in great anger, saying in his heart, "Are not the waters of Assyria as good as your Jordan? Why should I go into the Jordan? Why can I not be immersed in the waters of my native country?" But, finally, he was prevailed upon by his servant to try the experiment and he went into the Jordan as he was commanded and he was cleansed of his leprosy.

Supposing that he had dipped six times, and then, thinking there was no virtue in the water, had ceased, he would probably have remained a leper to the day of his death, but when he had complied to the letter, with a commandment given by a man having authority, the blessing came.

So on the occasion of Peter healing the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple. Said Peter, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto thee," and he commanded him in the

name of the Lord Jesus to rise up and walk. Supposing this lame man had laughed at these apostles—Peter and John—and had said, "Why do you command me to rise up and walk? I am a lame man, and have been lame about forty years—ever since my birth, you must be very foolish indeed, seeing my crippled condition, to command me to rise up and walk. Why do you not give me a reasonable command, one that I could comply with?" If he had reasoned thus in his heart, and had made no exertion to comply with the command given him he would not have been healed, but making an exertion to obey it he was healed, and when Peter and John were called before the high priests and the authorities of the Jewish nation, to give an account of themselves they boldly declared that this man was made whole through faith in the name of Jesus.

It required faith on the part of the afflicted to be healed, and if they refused to make that exertion it was proof that they had no faith. For instance, there was a man with a withered hand came before the Savior in the midst of the congregation on one occasion. This man's arm was useless, and it was impossible for him to make any motion with it. The Jews watched Jesus to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day, they were so strict and pious that they considered it a sin for a man to be healed on that day. Jesus perceived the thoughts of their hearts and he was filled with just indignation at their hypocrisy and wickedness. By and by he commanded this man saying unto him, "Stretch forth thine hand," and he stretched it forth and it was restored like the other. If he had refused to stretch forth his hand would he have been healed? Not at all. It is just so with baptism.

When the multitude on the Day of Pentecost, for instance, were pricked in their hearts, convinced that they were sinners, believing that Jesus was the Son of God, and desiring to repent before God, they cried out to the Apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and you shall receive the Holy Ghost, for the promise is to you and your children, and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call." There is no doubt that the multitude did as they were told, then and there, without putting it off or waiting several weeks, and they did not stop at repentance of sin, but they were forthwith baptized for the remission of their sins, for we are told that on the same day there were added to the church three thousand souls.

Supposing they had stopped with faith and repentance, and that they had said, "We will exercise faith in Jesus and we will enter into a covenant to put away evil and to work the works of righteousness henceforth, but as for baptism, it is only an outward ordinance and we will not attend to it." Do you think that, if they had reasoned and acted thus, they would have had the remission of their sins, or been added to the church by baptism? No, it required obedience to all three of these principles—faith in Jesus, repentance of sin, and baptism for the remission of their sins, before they could be forgiven, and be added to the church.

A great many people at the present day say, "Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," but we must believe before we can repent. It is utterly impossible for any person to repent acceptably before God unless he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of mankind. When a person believes in Jesus and then repents, that is, feels in his heart to forsake sin and to make restitution to those of his fellow beings against whom he may have sinned or done wrong—and this can be done immediately, without waiting for several weeks—he is then a fit candidate for baptism, and if he will yield obedience to that ordinance his sins will be washed away. Not by the virtue alone. Oh, no; but through the atonement wrought out by the shedding of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

From this you will see that we as Latter-day Saints believe that baptism is an ordinance essential to salvation. When I was a boy I heard it preached, sabbath after sabbath, by the sectarians in the State of New York, that to be born of God we must be converted—experience what they call religion, and after that we could go forward

and be baptized for the remission of sins. I did not know but this was all right. I was too young and inexperienced to know the difference between their teachings and those of the ancient apostles. I supposed that baptism was necessary, that it was well enough to comply with it, and as they taught, that it was an outward sign of an inward grace. They did not preach it as an ordinance through which the Lord would remit sin, or by which we could become justified before God, but simply as a sign or testimony, on the part of those converted to the Lord and to the world, of that inward grace or religion which they had experienced, and as a witness that they were born of God.

When I came to understand the gospel, as taught in the New Testament, I saw that it was a very different thing. I saw that mankind were required to be born of the water first for the remission of their sins, and then, as the Apostle Peter has said, they should receive the Holy Ghost. I saw then that this was a gift promised, not only to those who lived in ancient times, or to those who were gathered together on the Day of Pentecost, but to all afar off, "even to as many as the Lord our God shall call." This convinced me that the Holy Ghost was promised to all people on the face of the whole earth, providing that they would believe in Jesus, repent of their sins and be baptized for the remission thereof. When I was a boy about eighteen years old I used to attend the Methodist meetings a good deal, and I used to hear them telling about their conversion. One would be born of the Spirit while playing in some wilderness, another while praying in his closet, another in this place and another in that; but when I came to read the Scriptures understandingly I found that there were certain ordinances to be observed in order to secure the remission of sins, and the birth of the Spirit or the gift of the Holy Ghost; the former was baptism, the latter was the laying on of hands. I mean the laying on of the hands of the servants of God, not those who are not authorized to officiate in his name, they might lay their hands upon your heads and upon my head until the day of our death, and it would do us no good; but when men are called of God to administer the ordinances of baptism for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the persons to whom they administer, if they have believed on the Lord Jesus and repented of their sins, will surely receive the promised blessings, because they have complied with the conditions. Some may not receive the blessings, because, though they comply with the conditions outwardly, they do not from their hearts. This was the case with Simon Magus.

We are told that Philip went from Jerusalem to the city of Samaria, and he commenced preaching there, and he baptized a great number of the Samaritans, but not one among them had received the Holy Ghost. They had believed, repented and been baptized or born of the water, and there was great joy among them, because, having complied with the conditions, their sins were forgiven. But as yet the Holy Ghost had fallen upon none of them, neither man nor woman. Why was this? Because it needed a man having greater authority than Philip to impart it. Philip had authority to baptize in water, but he had not authority to administer in the higher ordinance of the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost; hence Peter and John, two apostles who had authority, went from the city of Jerusalem to Samaria, and when they came there they prayed for these Samaritans who had believed on Christ and been baptized, and after prayer they laid their hands upon them, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost. Here then was the birth of the water and the birth of the Spirit following.

A great many people used to refer me, when a boy, to the conversion of St. Paul—how he obtained religion; and through hearing sectarians preach on the subject I really got to believe that people could be converted without attending to any forms and ceremonies, for I actually believed that Paul was converted and received the remission of his sins before he was baptized. I supposed that his sins were forgiven at the time he saw the great light from heaven and heard the voice of Jesus speaking to him. I had not read the

Bible as I ought to have read it, if I had I should have found that that was merely a sectarian notion that had been instilled into my mind. In the 22nd chapter of the Acts of the Apostles Paul or Saul of Tarsus relates his experience. He tells us that he was going in great wrath and indignation against the early Christians, with letters from the chief priests, Sadducees, &c., to persecute them and cast them into prison. While he was pursuing his journey he saw a great light in the heavens and he fell to the earth. He then heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He immediately exclaimed, "Who art thou, Lord?" He had not the most distant idea that he was persecuting anybody up in heaven. The voice answered, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest." Saul was exceedingly astonished. He thought that Jesus was really an impostor, as he testifies—"I verily thought that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." He verily thought that he ought to persecute his followers thinking him to have been an impostor; but this voice that he heard and this light he saw in the heavens gave him faith that Jesus was really and truly what he professed to be—the Son of God. But did this remit his sins? No, he had not yet repented, he merely believed that Jesus was the Christ. But he cried in the anguish and bitterness of his soul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" as much as to say, "I believe that you are the Christ, but I want to put works to my faith." The Lord did not tell him what to do to obtain a remission of his sins, but said he—"Arise, go into Damascus and there it shall be shown thee what thou shalt do." Saul arose, but his natural sight had been taken away by the brightness of the light he had beheld and certain scales had been produced over his eyes by its intensity, and he had to be led down to Damascus, and there he began to pray and humble himself before the Lord. The Lord spoke to a certain man named Ananias who lived in Damascus, saying, "Go into a certain street, and there you will find one Saul of Tarsus, for behold he prayeth!" But Ananias felt a little dubious about it. He had heard how Saul persecuted the Saints, and how he was then seeking to cast them into prison, and he made some excuse unto the Lord. But the Lord insisted upon his going, and he went and found Saul, perfectly blind and praying and no doubt repenting in the anguish and bitterness of his soul. When Ananias found Saul and saw his condition he immediately said, "Why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Here, then, you see, that with all the faith of this man, and with all his repentance and prayer, his sins could not be washed away until he complied with this ordinance.

We also find, in reading the New Testament, that there were certain disciples at Ephesus who had been baptized unto John's baptism, but Paul did not know by whom they had been baptized. He began to question them, asking them, among other things, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" They replied, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." Paul then asked them with what baptism they were baptized. They told him John's, but they had not heard anything about the Holy Ghost. This proves very plainly that some impostor had come along to Ephesus pretending to be one of John's disciples, and had taught them about the baptism of water. Paul, finding that they had not been baptized legally, baptized them over again, and after their second baptism he laid his hands upon them and the Holy Ghost fell upon them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied. From all these instances which I have quoted we see that the baptism of water came first and the baptism of the Holy Ghost last.

As I said in the beginning, we are not very particular about forms, if these forms are introduced by men, yet, as a people, we believe in being very strict and very exact with regard to the forms that God has instituted; hence we do not receive any persons into this church without baptizing them. It matters not if they have been baptized a dozen times before, it matters not if their baptism has been by immersion. When we meet with a Baptist, for instance, who has been im-

mersed, or with a Campbellite, who believes in baptism for the remission of sins, or with those who have been sprinkled or poured, we question them with regard to the authority of the man who professed to baptize them in the name of the Lord. We ask them if he was a member of a church. "Oh, yes, he was a Methodist, Baptist or Campbellite minister, or he belonged to such and such a sect." "Does the sect to which the man belonged who baptized you, believe in any later revelation than the New Testament?" "Oh, no, they discard all new revelation." "Did the minister who baptized you believe that God has said anything since the days of John the Revelator?" "Oh no, they have their creed or discipline stating that there are only so many sacred books, and that God has not said anything since the canon of Scripture was completed by the Roman Catholic council at the close of the fourth century, and that there is nothing to be added thereto." "Then you really believe that God has said nothing to your sect or to the preacher who baptized you?" "Of course not," says the individual, "it is contrary to our doctrine to receive new revelation." "If God has not revealed anything since the days of the Apostles how did your minister know that God authorized him to take you down into the water, and baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost? How did he know that he was called to administer in any ordinance? Is there anything in the Scripture that authorizes a man to baptize in the name of the Trinity without being called of God?" "Certainly not." "How can he be called of God unless God has said something from the heavens later than the days of the Apostles?" "Why," says this person, "our minister takes his commission from the New Testament. Ministers do not need new revelation to call them to the ministry, there is all that is necessary in the New Testament." "What part of the New Testament?" "Well," says this individual who has been baptized, "you read the last chapter of Mark, where Jesus said unto the Apostles, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.' My minister claims that as his authority." "Well, why not every other person claim the same? If it authorizes one man, does it not authorize another, and still another? And where is there a person on the earth that it does not authorize? If it authorizes any one man, can you find any other who can read it whom it does not authorize?" But it authorizes no person whatever, and it is one of the most foolish arguments that could be brought forth to say that because eleven men in ancient times were called of God that that authorizes me or you. With the same propriety might it be said, for instance, that when a man is sent by the British government with authority to transact business as its plenipotentiary with the American government, and he dies, that his commission would authorize any other person who might have access to his papers, and gain possession of it. Suppose that a person were to obtain the written commission—such a one as is here supposed—of an individual deceased, and he should present himself at the headquarters of our government, and claim to be minister of Great Britain, and when he is asked for his credentials he says, "The British government has not given me any authority, and in fact has for a long time past ceased sending ministers, but I happened to find the credentials of a man now dead, and here it is, and it is this which authorizes me to act as the minister of Great Britain to the government of the United States." Would not the individuals who heard such expressions be justified in regarding him who uttered them as an insane person, and that his professions and pretensions were the very height of absurdity? Such professions and pretensions are no more absurd than those of the ministers of the various religious denominations of the present day, who will deny new revelation and yet tell you that they have authority to baptize and to administer the various ordinances of the gospel because God said, eighteen hundred years ago, to eleven men, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Why, the commission received by those eleven men did not authorize anybody else even in that day. Paul could not act on their commission, though he lived