

DISCOURSE BY PREST. GEORGE Q. CANNON,

DELIVERED

In the Tabernacle, Ogden, Sunday
Morning, October 18th, 1884.

REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

I WILL read a portion of the 7th chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews.

[The speaker read the whole of the 7th chapter.]
Proceeding he said: This chapter that I have read in your hearing is the 7th chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews. In this entire book of Hebrews Paul reasons with the Jews, unto whom the epistle was addressed, to show them that Jesus, the Son of God, whom they had crucified, was a Priest after the order of Melchisedec, and that the Priesthood which had been taken away during the days of Moses in the wilderness, had been restored through Him. The Jews entertained the idea that Priesthood necessarily came through the tribe of Levi, and that the power and the authority thereof—that is, to minister in all things pertaining to the Priesthood—were confined to that tribe, and that no one had the right outside of that tribe to officiate in the ordinances pertaining to God and to mediation between God and the people or the people and God. But Paul very clearly proved in his reasoning with them that there was a Priesthood higher than that which had been exercised by the descendants of Aaron.

It is well for us, who, as a people, believe in Priesthood, that we should understand the nature and character and power of the Priesthood which God confirms upon man when He calls him to act in His stead in the midst of the people. As a people we differ in our views upon these points from almost every other church. There are one or two sects in existence which attach a great importance to Priesthood, but the most of them which form the so-called Christian world reject the idea of Priesthood and deny that it is necessary for it to be bestowed upon man. This feeling has doubtless arisen as a consequence of the abuses that have grown up through the maladministration of what is termed the Priesthood. In rebelling against the Catholic Church and its pretensions men have gone to the other extreme, and have discarded the idea of Priesthood entirely, and claimed that all men are alike before God; that all men are equally endowed with authority from God and to exercise the power and the authority that were originally bestowed upon those who held the truth.

In these last days, in the organization of this Church, God, in His infinite wisdom, impressed upon His servant Joseph Smith the necessity of there being a re-bestowal of the Priesthood, in order to give him the authority to officiate in the ordinances of the Kingdom of God. This must have been impressed upon the prophet's mind at a very early day, from the fact that, notwithstanding he had been brought up among the protestant sects, and had doubtless shared in the views which they entertained respecting the right of all men who were impressed by the spirit, and who were prompted by an inward call to act as ministers of God, he refrained from attempting in the least degree to do anything in the name of God or of Jesus Christ until he had received the power and authority from on high through the bestowal of the Priesthood upon him. The revelations he had received from the Lord, with the ministration of holy angels, did not, he plainly perceived, authorize him to act as a minister of the Lord in the administration of ordinances. He never attempted to do anything in administering ordinances, or anything that a Priest might do, until he had been ordained of God through the administration of John the Baptist. Then, and not till then, did he officiate in the ordinance of baptism. Much as he and his companion desired that ordinance; much as they desired to become participants in the blessings that flow from the reception of an ordinance of that holy character, he never attempted, until he had been thus empowered from on high, to administer it.

Now, the prevalent idea in the world has been that if a man should be so favored as to receive the ministrations or visitations of angels, or to receive any manifestations of what might be termed a supernatural character, he would be completely invested with the power necessary to preach the Gospel unto his fellow men and to administer all the ordinances thereof. But the Prophet Joseph not only received the ministrations of angels, but actually had revelations from God, which are written in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants and which are now the word of God to the Church. He received these revelations through the inspiration of the Almighty. He also by means of the Urim and Thummim translated the Book of Mormon; was, in fact, a seer as well as a revelator; had the spirit of prophecy to predict those things that should take place in the future, and many events that have since taken place were prophesied of by him before he was really ordained of God to administer the ordinances of life and salvation. I know that this is an exceptional instance. It may be possible that there is not another like it in the history of our race where a man was so highly favored of God, endowed

with such authority, such power and had such manifestations of the mind and will of God as he received without having the Holy Priesthood. But it accords with the ideas so frequently expressed by the brethren respecting the Prophet Joseph and many others, that they were ordained before the foundations of the world were laid to come forth and accomplish the labor and the work that they did. There is no room for doubt in regard to the truth of this statement that is so frequently made. In the early boyhood of the Prophet Joseph he was moved upon in a mysterious manner to seek unto God. By the exercise of a faith that was uncommon, and in fact it may be said unknown upon the earth, he was able to receive the ministrations of God the Father, and of His Son Jesus Christ; thus showing in the very beginning of his career, that he was a man or a spirit that was highly favored of God—a man to whom God desired to give particular manifestations of His kindness and goodness and power, and this was followed up from that time until his death by continued manifestations of the favor and the will and the power of God unto him. But it is a remarkable fact—and I wish to impress it, I think it is worthy of remembrance by all of us—that notwithstanding the Prophet Joseph had all these manifestations, and was, as I have said, a prophet and seer and a revelator, he never attempted—notwithstanding the ideas that were so prevalent among mankind, and especially in the region where he lived and where he received his education—to officiate in any of the ordinances of the house of God, or of the Gospel of salvation, until he received the everlasting Priesthood. When that was bestowed upon him; when he received the Priesthood after the order of Aaron, and was ordained by the angel who alone held the keys, who was a literal descendant of Aaron, and by virtue of that descent entitled to the keys of that Priesthood, having exercised the authority thereof while in the flesh—then and not till then did he administer the ordinance of baptism for the remission of sins. And then he refrained from acting in ordinances belonging to the Melchisedec Priesthood, that higher Priesthood, by the authority of which the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost is administered unto the children of men. Having authority to baptize in water given unto him, he did not go any farther, until the Lord in His kindness and mercy bestowed upon him, through the administration of those apostles who held the keys till the death of our Savior, the authority to administer in those higher ordinances and to exercise the power and authority of this higher Priesthood. This illustrates most perfectly how careful men ought to be in acting in the name of God, not to overstep the bounds of the authority conferred upon them, but to carefully keep within those limits that are assigned to them in which to exercise authority. It is a lesson unto us as a people. We should be particular ourselves and should impress every man with the great care that he should exercise to confine his acts to the authority which he has received from the Almighty.

Jesus himself, no doubt, was equally careful in regard to the authority which He held. He was called to be a Priest after the order of Melchisedec—that is, this higher Priesthood. He exercised the authority thereof among the children of men. He still is a Priest after that holy order. It was by virtue of that Priesthood that He officiated in the ordinances that He administered unto men. Though the Son of God,

the Savior himself did not attempt, because of His sonship, because of His high descent, to officiate among the children of men aside from and independent of the authority of the Holy Priesthood, that is, the Priesthood after the order of Melchisedec. It was by virtue of that Priesthood and authority that He officiated, that He administered the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, which John the Baptist announced unto the people he would do when He came. Jesus in administering that baptism and conferring that blessing did so by virtue of and in the authority of the Melchisedec Priesthood. He would not, as I have said, have dared to do this independent of that authority; so in laying His hands upon His Apostles He conferred upon them this power and this authority. He commanded them to go forth and administer unto the children of men by virtue of that power and authority, and the Church that He built up, and this Church of His that is now established in these last days, and the officers of it, derive their authority from that source. It has come down legitimately from the days of Melchisedec; in fact, it has come down from our great father Adam. He received the Priesthood of the Son of God; He was ordained to that Priesthood, and it has come down by lineal descent from him unto all his children who have that authority to-day and who exercise it upon the earth. It can be traced in the same manner as the descent of man is traced. It can be traced to Father Adam. He received it through angelic administration. It was bestowed upon him and upon his son Abel and upon his son Seth, and from them it has come down through the line of the Priesthood—from Seth to Enos, from Enos to Cainan from Cainan to Mahalaleel, and so on down until the days of Noah, who received it from his grandfather. These men were ordained in their various generations to this Priesthood, the Priesthood after the order of the Son of God.

By virtue of this Priesthood Noah and his sons ministered and labored, as we are told, among the children of men to persuade them to forsake their sins and to turn to righteousness, lest the Lord should overwhelm them with a flood. This flood had been predicted long before it came. Enoch had beheld it in vision, and he went forth, as we are told in the record that has come down to us from him, and labored to the best of his ability among the children of men to avert the dreadful consequences of this threatened flood, which he had been informed by the Lord would overwhelm the inhabitants because of their wickedness. He labored in this Priesthood for 365 years and upwards—that is, he walked with God for that length of time,—and by the exercise of that Priesthood he obtained such great power from God that he and his people were translated. Zion was not. It was taken to the bosom of the Lord. The Priesthood, however, was still left. His son Methuselah received it and he bestowed it upon Lamech, and Noah received it, from Methuselah, and the sons of Noah received and exercised the authority of it in the midst of the children of men in order to save them, but were unsuccessful. Melchisedec received it and because of his greatness and the power that he attained unto with God he became so distinguished that the Priesthood after the order of the Son of God has been called after his name from that time until the present, to avoid, as we are told in the revelations, the too frequent repetition of the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Then Abraham received it, and he bestowed it upon his children. Moses, however, received it through a different line, as we are told. He received it from his father-in-law, Jethro, and exercised it among the people. It was the same Priesthood that his ancestor Abraham held, and by it he performed the mighty works that he accomplished.

To return again to Melchisedec. We find here that Paul in speaking about him says that he was "King of peace." And he goes on to say, as we have it translated, that he was "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life," and the whole Christian world have gone astray over this expression of Paul, not being able to understand it, thinking that that which I read in your hearing referred to Melchisedec himself, when in reality it was the Priesthood he bore. It was after the power of an endless life. It had no beginning; no end. It is eternal as our Father and God, and it extends into the eternities to come, and it is as endless as eternity is endless, and as our God is endless; for it is the power and authority by which our Father and God sits upon His throne and wields the power He does throughout the innumerable worlds over which He exercises dominion. It is the power and authority by which the Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, has attained unto to that which has been promised unto Him, and by which He has become the Savior and the Redeemer of the world.

This Priesthood, as I have said, came down unto Moses, but the children of Israel would not have it in their midst. We are told very plainly in the revelations that Moses sought diligently to sanctify his people and to lead them into the presence of God by means of this Priesthood, but they would not have it. The ordinances of godliness that were administered by it were not acceptable to that generation; they rejected them, and besought Moses to stand between them and their Father and God, for they could not endure His presence. Hence the Priesthood was taken away and there was no exercise of the power and the authority of it among the Jews, except occasionally, when Prophets received authority from the Lord, until the days of the Savior, when it was restored once more in its fulness and in the plenitude of its power to the earth, and men began to exercise the authority thereof.

My brethren and sisters, we are building temples at the present time in which we have ordinances administered unto us for those who have died. Why is this necessary? It is because the Priesthood of the Son of God was withdrawn for a long period of time from the earth. The children of men have been born, they have lived, they have died without any of the ordinances being administered unto them by those who held the Priesthood of the Son of God. It is true that many sought after God in a certain manner and according to the light they had, and many obtained some degree of knowledge concerning God. Some of them had a testimony of Him through their faith, and died at peace with God. Many of our ancestors lived in this condition, and God bore witness to them by His Holy Spirit that He was pleased with them. But what of that? Is that all that is necessary to place them in a saved condition? By no means. Something more than that is necessary to obtain for them the full remission of their sins and to place them in a condition where they can be saved and exalted in God's presence. As I said to you in the beginning, something more was necessary for Joseph than that he was a Revelator, a Seer, and a Prophet to constitute him a servant of God empowered to administer the ordinances of life and salvation. A Wesley, a Luther, a Calvin, a Wycliffe, and a host of others who have arisen in the world, imbued with the highest and purest motives, and the highest and most intense desires for the salvation of their fellow men, have labored zealously to turn men to God and to bring them to a knowledge of

the Savior; but they have not had the authority of the Holy Priesthood. They themselves could not usher people into the Church of God. They could not legitimately administer an ordinance pertaining to the salvation of the human family. Yet God, in many instances, accepted of them, where they sought unto Him according to the best light they possessed; He accepted of them and their labors, and He witnessed unto them, by the outpouring of His Spirit upon them, that He was pleased with them and He whispered peace to their souls. In every land, in every nation, and among the people of every creed, men and women of this kind have been found, and according to their faith and diligence their works have been acceptable to our Father. Men have thought that the Christian lands and the Christian people, so called, have been the most favored of God in this respect. No doubt they have, because they have had knowledge concerning the Savior that other lands and other peoples have not had; but in pagan lands, in lands where the name of Jesus has never been heard, where men have sought after God and endeavored to live according to the light that He has given unto them and the Spirit that He has bestowed upon them, and which He bestows upon every man and woman born into the world. He has accepted of them, and in the day of the Lord Jesus, the heathen will have part in the first resurrection. Our ancestors have, in common with others, been destitute of the power and the authority of the Holy Priesthood. Hence we build temples; hence we go into these temples and attend to the ordinances of life and salvation for our kindred who have died in ignorance of this power, or were in a position where they could not have it exercised in their behalf. They could not be baptized for the remission of their sins; they could not have hands laid upon them for the reception of the Holy Ghost; they could not have any other ordinance administered unto them, because the authority to administer was not upon the earth, and whatever might be done in the name of God or in the name of Jesus, by those who thought they had the authority, or who assumed to possess it, was of no avail so far as salvation was concerned; so far as acceptance by the Lord our God is concerned it was as though nothing had been done. Hence it is that in these last days, God having in His great kindness and mercy, opened the heavens once more and sent from heaven that authority which has so long been withdrawn—God having done this, we are put in the possession of the authority to administer to each other the ordinances of life and salvation, and not only to administer to each other, but to exercise that authority in behalf of those who have lived before us, lived in ages that are past, so that we can connect generation unto generation until we reach back to the time when our ancestors did hold the Holy Priesthood. In this manner the work of salvation will progress, until throughout the millenium, temples will be built and the servants and handmaidens of God will go into these temples and officiate, until all who have been born upon the face of the earth, who have not become sons of perdition, will be redeemed, and the entire family be re-united, Adam standing at the head.

You can see, my brethren and sisters, the importance there is in our having the Priesthood of the Son of God in our midst. You can see how necessary it is that it should be exercised and exercised properly. You can see how necessary it is that the ordinances of life and salvation should be administered by those who are legitimately ordained to this authority. When a man lays his hands upon the head of his fellow man and professes to bestow authority, the mere profession of that authority will avail nothing unless he has indeed the authority and has it legitimately. A man who may profess to have the authority; a man who may say I have ordained this person or the other person, unless he has the authority to do so is a mere pretender and his acts cannot be recognized nor acknowledged of God. I believe the time will come when it will be necessary for every man to trace the line in which he has received the Priesthood that he exercises. It is therefore of great importance in our Church that records should be kept, and that every man should know whence he derives his authority—from what source, through what channel he has received the Holy Priesthood, and by what right he exercises that authority, and administers the ordinances thereof. I believe this is of extreme importance, and that where there are doubts as to a man's legitimately exercising that authority, that doubt should be removed. Every man should be careful on this point, to know where he gets his Priesthood; that it has come to him clean and undefiled, legitimately; and when men are cut off from that Priesthood by the voice of the Servants of God, there is an authority on the earth which God recognizes in the heavens and that man is cut off from the Priesthood. He said in ancient days in speaking to His Apostles:

"Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."
"Whosoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

In these last days God has, in like manner, restored this same authority of the Holy Priesthood. He has restored to man the power to bind on earth and it shall be bound in heaven.

He has restored the authority to remit sins on earth, and He, the Great Eternal, our Father in heaven, says that when these sins are remitted they shall be remitted, but when they are not remitted they shall stand against those who commit the sins.

Therefore, there is this authority in the Church, and you can witness the exercise of it and the power of it in your own experience. Whenever the voice of the people of God, and the authorities that God has placed in His Church, whom He has ordained—whenever they lift up their hands against a man to cut him off from the Church, to withdraw from him the authority of the Priesthood that has exercised, in every instance, without a single exception, from the beginning of this Church until to-day, God has most signally and wonderfully manifested His approval of the acts and has withdrawn from the man, (whosoever he may be, however great and mighty he may have been in the Church) His power and His blessing. It was so with Oliver Cowdery, the companion of Joseph, the man who received with him the Priesthood upon whose head John the Baptist laid his hands, and upon whose head also, the Apostles Peter, James and John laid their hands. These glorious blessings and favors that God gave him did not prevent his falling into sin. When he did fall into sin and the Church and the Priesthood united in lifting their hands to cut him off from the Church, and take from the Priesthood and the authority that he had so powerfully exercised and which God had favored him with so long, God recognized the action, the men fell, also. Six of the original twelve fell into transgression. They were men of ability, men of some of them were greatly favored. Lyman Johnson had wonderful manifestations given unto him; but he fell into transgression and the Church with the Priesthood united in lifting up their hands against him, power and authority that had distinguished him before was withdrawn, and he became as other men. As with all of them. So with Sidney Rigdon, that mighty man, that eloquent man, that spokesman for the Prophet Joseph, of whom the Book of Mormon had spoken for hundreds of years, he had said for thousands of years of his birth. He also, when the Priesthood and Church in Nauvoo lifted their hands against him, fell. Lucifer who once was a mighty one in the presence of God and exercised great authority; like Lucifer he and the authority and power that attended him were withdrawn, and he became like unto other men. This has been the case in every instance. You point out an exception? Look them wherever you see them, men that have held the Priesthood, who were bright and influential and powerful, whom God blessed, whose ministrations God sealed with His power, were in the possession of that authority, exercising it in purity and the fullness of purpose—when this was the case He was with them; but when they went into transgression and the Priesthood was taken from them, they became weak, and their sin was gone. They are marked as the people wherever you see them. Thus showing that God in the days confirms the promise He made unto His servants, that whenever they bound on earth should be bound in heaven, and that whatever they loosed on earth should be loosed in heaven.

It is by the exercise of this power in our midst that we are preserved, has given it unto us. It is true He placed this authority and power, as I have said, in earthen vessels, in chosen weak men, fallible men, who are subject to all the failings and weaknesses of human nature. Nevertheless, it is the authority that He built up His Church in all ages, the authority, the only authority on the earth that can act in His name. When a man has this authority goes forth and confines himself to legitimate exercise and keeps within the bounds of his authority, God is with him; God confirms that which he does; God places His seal and blessing and approval upon his acts, and though all the earth should combine to undo them and to say they are no effect, they will stand, nevertheless, and in the Courts of heaven will be recorded and confirmed. There is no power among men that can disannul the acts, that can revoke or invalidate in any manner. It is this that makes this Church beyond the power and reach of man. Courts cannot affect in any manner the decisions or the acts of ordinances that are administered by the servants of God. That which is done in the name of the Holy Priesthood will stand and will be fulfilled both in the world and out of the world, both in time and in eternity. Hence it is that when an Elder goes forth in the authority of the Holy Priesthood to baptize a candidate who has repented of his sins, God confirms that ordinance; God remits the sins of that individual; God by bestowing His Holy Spirit witnesses unto that soul that his sins or her sins are remitted. In manner when an Elder lays his hands upon the head of a man or a woman who has been thus baptized and sealed unto that individual, "receive ye, Holy Ghost," God in heaven, bound the oath and the covenant that He made, bound by all the conditions that pertain to the everlasting Priesthood, will cause the Holy Ghost to descend upon that soul, and he or she will be filled therewith. He receives the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, and