

## DISCOURSE

By Elder ORSON PRATT, delivered in the Fourteenth Ward School-house, Salt Lake City, Sunday evening, Jan. 19, 1873.

REPORTED BY D. W. EVANS.

I do not know when I was more edified and instructed than I was this afternoon in listening to the discourse of Elder Hyde. According to my judgment it was certainly calculated in its nature to edify and instruct every person who listened to it with attention. It was delivered in eloquent language, was plain and simple, pointed and definite, and, if obeyed, was calculated to do good to all.

The Lord has appointed a variety of gifts in his kingdom, some having one and some another, and especially in the Quorum of the Twelve, of which Brother Hyde is the president, there is a great variety of gifts and talents, and it gives me great pleasure to listen to them, and it would be with great satisfaction that I would listen more than I do. But I am frequently called upon to address the people when I would prefer to listen to others.

What subject I may present before you to-night I do not know. Sometimes a subject will open to my mind while I am listening to the singers, and sometimes I rise without having the first thing before my mind to speak to the people, and I trust in God to give me what is needful at the very moment. This is the case with me this evening, and I do humbly pray to my Father in heaven, in the name of his beloved Son, that he will grant unto me the Spirit to discern what to say and what would be most adapted to the wants of those who are present. There is such a vast field of light and truth which God has revealed in different ages of the world, and more especially in our times, that the great difficulty with the servant of God, I have often thought, is to distinguish and discern what portion of the great variety would be most pleasing in the sight of the Lord to lay before the people.

There are a great many peculiarities in our religion, but the generality of the Latter-day Saints are well acquainted with them. Sometimes strangers attend our meetings who would be glad to have us dwell upon certain subjects, which they think would greatly interest them. We are willing to do so, but still we study to have the Spirit to edify all, whether they be in the church, or whether they be strangers who are here on a visit.

Among the peculiarities which God has revealed directly to the Latter-day Saints may be mentioned the various degrees of happiness and glory which exist in the eternal world, also the various degrees of punishment upon the different classes of individuals. Formerly, before we became Latter-day Saints, we were instructed by our fathers and mothers, and by the ministers whom we heard, that there were but two places in the eternal worlds, one or the other of which was intended for all the human family; that all that happened to miss heaven would be sent to the other place, which they called hell. This subject was dwelt upon very lengthily and very interestingly by Brother Hyde this afternoon, and during his remarks he told about the different mansions that God had in reserve for all the human family, some of which are glorious, and others intended as places of punishment. These things were dwelt upon very fully by Brother Hyde, in some respects, but there were some items connected with them that were not fully investigated and laid before the people.

The way that we obtained a more perfect knowledge of the future condition of the children of men was by revelation; indeed all the knowledge that ever mankind did obtain in relation to this matter was by revelation. We read in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians something about the different glories connected with the resurrection of the dead. We are told in the reasoning of Paul that when people come forth from the dead, some will inherit one glory and some another; and these glories are typified by the various creations which the Lord had made. Paul says, "there is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, and that as one star differs from another star in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead."

We are also told in the Scriptures that there is a great variety of punishments as well as glories, these punishments differing in nature according to the works of the children of men. For instance we read of some persons who are to be punished for sins they have committed without any chance of forgiveness either in this world or in the world to come. This plainly indicates to us that certain classes of sins can not be forgiven in that world, while other classes of sins may be forgiven on certain conditions. He that sins against the Holy Ghost, we are told, shall not receive forgiveness. Men can sin against God the Father, and if they repent in this world, they may be forgiven; if they sin against Jesus his Son, and repent and work the works of righteousness, these sins may be blotted out; but if they sin against the Holy Ghost after having received the same and been baptized by him, there is no forgiveness for that sin, neither in this world nor in the world to come.

Now if there is to be a variety of punishments as well as a variety of glories, there must be a variety of places of punishment. It would look inconsistent to us, even here in this life, to see a person guilty of but a small crime against the laws of our country thrust into the same dungeon with the murderer. It would be unjust, for instance, according to our notions, for a person who has committed but a trifling offence against the law to be thrust into the darkest and deepest dungeon along with him who has shed innocent blood. We have sufficient justice in our own bosoms to classify these individuals and to point out to each the apartment in which he is to dwell. Is the Lord less just than man? Is he not filled with the great principles of justice far beyond that which any man ever did receive? From him have emanated all our ideas of justice, consequently we cannot look upon him as a being who would consign the poor heathen who died without a knowledge of the law, and others who have led moral lives but who have not obeyed the gospel of the Son of God, to the same punishment as the murderer and him who sheds innocent blood. We should regard it as unjust if all these classes were to be thrust into one place, there to welter under the same conditions of punishment throughout the endless ages of eternity without any hope of redemption. I could not look upon this as just, and I presume that no other reflecting being could, especially if he was acquainted with the Scriptures. Jesus, in speaking upon this subject, says, "He that knows his master's will and does it not shall be beaten with many stripes;" while he who is ignorant of his master's will and does things that are worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few. I have not quoted the saying of Jesus, word for word, but I have given you the sentiment; the Lord, therefore, in judging man, judges not by the act in all cases, but according to the understanding and knowledge of the individual who performs that act. If two persons were each to commit a murder—shed innocent blood—and one had a full knowledge of the revealed law of God, and the other was in entire ignorance of it, there would be a distinction in judging these two characters. We would say at once that he who had sinned against knowledge should receive a heavier punishment than he who had not this knowledge.

Suppose that Saints, who have not only heard the law of God, but have embraced the gospel of the Son of God, have been renewed in their minds by the power of the Holy Ghost and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, should be so far overcome as to shed innocent blood, would there be any forgiveness for them? Not at all. Would it be our duty, if such a person were judged, and condemned by the laws of our country to be hanged by the neck until dead, to visit him and pray that God would forgive his sins? No, we would be sinning against God in doing so. Why? Because God has revealed to us that persons who have this light and knowledge, and shed innocent blood, cannot be forgiven in this world nor in the world to come, and we should not ask him to do that which he has decreed that he will not do. Such a person commits the unpardonable sin, he sheds innocent blood after having the light of the Holy Ghost, knowing that in so doing he is not only sinning against God the Father and against his Son, but against

the convictions of the Holy Ghost.

Supposing, again, that persons outside of this church, that have heard the gospel of the Son of God, but have refused to obey it, should murder, they sin against great light and knowledge, but not against the Holy Ghost. Here is the difference between the two classes of murderers; the Latter-day Saint would never be forgiven, but he would become a son of perdition.

Now let me bring up some instances from Scripture in regard to these different classes of individuals and the light and knowledge which they had. Some may be forgiven, as I have already stated, in the world to come. Let me refer you to a certain class that are named in the Scriptures that will be forgiven on certain conditions. You recollect that the Apostle Peter, having gathered around him a large congregation of Jews, the murderers of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who had shed innocent blood, delivered to them a discourse, but it was a very different one to that which he preached to the mixed multitude who had gathered from the different nations on the Day of Pentecost. When he preached to the latter he said, "Repent, every one of you, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, for the promise is unto you and your children, and unto all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call." That was a true gospel sermon, preached to individuals that were not guilty of murder. They were all required to repent, believe in Jesus Christ, to be baptized in water for the remission of sins, and they and all who were afar off, who would receive the gospel, were promised the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost. But come to the other sermon to which I have referred, the one preached to the wicked and corrupt Jews who crucified Jesus. Peter said, we wot not but what you have done it through your ignorance; in other words, you have not received the Holy Ghost, and because you have not had the Spirit of the Lord resting upon you, you have shed the blood of the Innocent One, you have murdered the Son of God, the Messiah; but you have done it through ignorance. Now the question is, was there any hope for them? Could they have their sins forgiven in this life? No, Peter, after first telling them that they had shed the blood of the Just One in their ignorance, then tells them how and when they may obtain forgiveness. I will repeat the words: "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted"—no baptism here—"repent ye, therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, when he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, whom the heavens must receive until the times of the restitution of all things spoken of by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began." He did not tell them to be baptized for the remission of their sins. Why? Because he understood too well the nature of their sin to tell them to be baptized for the remission thereof. He knew they had lost that privilege in this world, because they had shed the blood of the Holy and Just One. He said to them, If you will repent now, you murderers, you who have killed Jesus, the Just and Holy One, there is one hope that even your sins may be blotted out. Not in this life, not by baptism for the remission of sins, but when the time of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord and he shall send Jesus Christ, whom the heavens will receive until then, and not even then unless they repent while here in this life. This must have been sorrowful news to those to whom it was communicated, if they believed it.

"Repent and be converted." Notice now what this sentence means. The word "converted" has been construed to be born of God, or to become a new creature; but the true meaning of the word is to reform our lives, converted from doing that which is evil to do that which is good, turning from sin and transgression to that which is righteous before God. If those Jews would repent and turn or be converted from their sins to do that which was right they had a hope of having their sins blotted out when Jesus should be sent from the presence of the Father in the times of restitution; but until then they must remain in torment, suffering for their sins.

Let me bring up another instance. There was a man in ancient times, named David, and because he was a man after God's own heart, the Lord chose him to be king over Israel. The Lord also greatly blessed this man, and poured out richly upon him the spirit of prophecy and revelation, and many of his psalms, which we now sing with so much pleasure in our meetings, contain prophecies relating to the most remote generations of the human family. This man was a prophet and revelator, he was filled with the Holy Ghost and spoke as he was moved upon by that Spirit. God loved him, and said that he was a man after his own heart. God also blessed him, while but a ruddy youth, fleeing from cave to cave, and from mountain to mountain to escape from the persecutions of Saul, who sought to take his life, with eight wives. This was before he was placed upon the throne. But after Saul had been cut off and David had been elevated to the throne of Israel, the Lord also gave him all the wives of Saul his master. So says Nathan the prophet, and he was sent to reprove David. What had he done to need reproof? Why he had taken his neighbor's wife, a person he had no claim upon, and he not only committed adultery by thus taking the wife of another, but by his order her lawful husband was placed in front of the battle that he might be destroyed, and he was destroyed, hence, though he himself did not thrust a dagger to his heart, he became a murderer in the sight of heaven by having this man placed where his blood would be shed. After all his goodness, and after all the light and knowledge which God had given to this man, he committed these two great crimes. Nathan the prophet was sent to reprove him for them, and he did so by means of a parable. He told David, the king, that a certain poor man had but one ewe lamb, and his rich neighbor, close by, had a great flock, and there came along a stranger, and the rich man went to this poor man's fold and took the only sheep he had and dressed it in order to make a sumptuous feast for the stranger. This kindled David's wrath, for though he had transgressed, the principle of justice was not extinct in his bosom, and he said, "He who hath done this thing shall surely die." Nathan said, "Thou art the man." God hath given to thee a great number of wives, among the rest all the wives of thy master Saul. All this great flock of sheep, as it were, has been given unto you from the Lord, yet you have gone and taken the only one that a poor man had, and committed adultery with her, therefore said the Lord, I will punish you. With what kind of punishment was this man punished? Among them was that of suffering in the eternal worlds. How long? I can not say exactly, but a good many centuries, a thousand years at least; this man, once righteous, now wicked, had to suffer the penalty of that crime. Did he repent? He did. Did he cry unto the Lord? He did. Was he sorely troubled? He was, and he was perhaps as repentant as any one could be; but the decree had gone forth, and hence that man had to endure the penalty of his crime. Peter, when referring to this subject on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, quotes from the Psalms of David, and says, "Thou hast not left my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." It seems that after all, though David's repentance could not wipe away his sin, yet he had a hope, and he looked forward to the time when he would be liberated from hell; when that time arrived he would come forth and receive some kind of a glory, how much I do not know, for it is not revealed; but suffice it to say, he sinned against great light and knowledge and because of his sin he fell from a very high position. That he had received many of the principles that are now understood by the Latter-day Saints under the new and everlasting covenant, I doubt; for if he had he never could have been redeemed, he never could have said, "Thou wilt redeem my soul from hell," etc.

Let us refer to some other instances. There were the Lamanites, a people who, according to the Book of Mormon, had dwelt in ignorance on this American continent before Christ came. They had dwelt here for centuries, and before the coming of our Savior they were

sunk in the depths of ignorance. They had lost the knowledge of the principles of salvation, and they had become a very ignorant, wicked, idolatrous people. The Nephites, an enlightened nation which dwelt on this continent at the same time, sent missionaries to the Lamanites to convert them, if possible from their sins. They went amongst them and had much success, bringing a great many thousands of them to a knowledge of the truth. This nation had been taught, in their ignorance and wickedness, that there was no harm in murdering the Nephites, and they had murdered them while in ignorance of the law of God; but when the gospel was laid before them could they obtain forgiveness for these murders? On certain conditions and one of them was that they would lay down their weapons of war, and they did so, burying them deep in the earth as a testimony before God that they would no more shed innocent blood; and through their great sorrow and repentance the Lord had compassion upon them and he forgave in this life the sins they had committed in ignorance. That showed that murderers, under certain conditions, could be forgiven here; but there are other classes of murderers for whose forgiveness in this life it would be very wrong to pray, even if they never had received the Holy Ghost—I mean those who have read and understood the revealed law. To pray for present forgiveness would be contrary to the mind and will of God, and hence it would be sinning against him. I believe I have said sufficient to show the principle upon which the Lord acts in punishing the sins of the children of men. Now let me say a few words in relation to their coming forth and redemption.

I will here ask, will many of these individuals who have sinned against God come forth and inherit that high degree of exaltation in the celestial world? This is a great question. Can they inherit the same glory that will be enjoyed by the Saints who have lived in different ages of the world and endured faithful to the end? Can they receive that full exaltation and shine forth in the Kingdom of God? No. Why not? Because they are not prepared for it. I do not say but what they may in some future age, according to the purposes of God, be led along from one step to another, until, finally, some of them attain to celestial glory. We Latter-day Saints believe that when the Lord comes he will redeem the heathen nations, not into his presence, into celestial glory, but they will come forth from their graves; not with celestial bodies and prepared to wear a celestial crown, to shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. No; such a glory they cannot have, but they will have a glory adapted to the light and knowledge which they have had, and that glory is typified by the moon. "There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, and as one star differeth from another star in glory, so also in the resurrection of the dead." Now, there is quite a difference among these celestial bodies that shine in the firmament. The sun is far more glorious than the moon, so much so that astronomers tell us it would take several hundred thousand full moons to make a light equal to the light of the sun; in other words if all our visible firmament from the horizon, was just one glare of moons, all this would not be equal to the light of the sun, consequently you can form an idea of the difference between the glory of the sun and the glory of the moon.

Again, when we look upon those twinkling stars in the firmament of heaven, we see some shining with a much greater brilliancy than others, and they are divided into classes by astronomers, and ranked according to their magnitude, or according to the intensity of the light they shed forth upon our world, not according to the real nature of the stars, because they are too far off for us to judge of that, only we know that they are suns, the centres of systems, and that they shine by their own radiance; and if we were as near to them as we are to our sun, many of them would be far more resplendent in their glory and would shed forth more light than our sun does. But the Apostle Paul in speaking on this subject had reference to the glory of the stars as they appear to us, and to the amount of light which they seem to send forth.