

## DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

ELDER ORSON PRATT,

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REPORTED BY GEO. F. GIBBS.

THERE is a Scripture which reads, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" These words of the Savior have just occurred to me, and in dwelling on them for a short time, I earnestly pray that the Spirit of God may dictate me; for I do not wish to speak to you in my own strength, neither by my own wisdom: but I desire to speak to you by the wisdom that comes down from heaven, and by that strength that is imparted by the power of the Holy Ghost, sent forth from the Father.

We profess, as Latter-day Saints, to be the children of light. God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. The light that proceeds forth from him oftentimes shines in dark places, but it is not always the case that the children of this world comprehend this light. That light may be round about them; it may shine before them, illuminating their pathway, but they, loving the darkness rather than light, prefer to walk contrary to the light, they prefer the pathway of darkness, they love darkness because they love evil: they love sin, they love wickedness, they love those principles that are contrary to the light of heaven. Light is something that comes from God; it cleaves unto light, it rejoices in the light, and he that hath light in his heart that comes from heaven, rejoices in the reception of still greater light. Now this is what the children of God—the Latter-day Saints, should most seek for, that their minds may be full of that light that shines from heaven, that it may illuminate their understandings, that when they hear anything that is spoken by the principle of light, by the spirit of truth, that it may commend itself to their hearts and understanding, and that they may cleave to it, and thus manifest before one another and before God the Eternal Father, that they are indeed the children of light. How shall we obtain this pure undiluted principle of light that comes from God? By faith, and in no other way. In vain do mankind seek after light and truth, without the illuminations of the spirit of God, and without faith in him. They may receive the natural light; they may understand many things that are natural, according to the definition of the word natural. The natural man may discern things that are natural; by the natural eye, he may perceive the natural light that shines, and may obtain much information and knowledge pertaining to natural things—things intended of the Lord to be given to mankind in common, both to his children as well as the wicked who become not his children because of their disobedience and sinfulness. But if you would be enlightened beyond the natural man—if you would possess knowledge that reaches beyond his knowledge—if you would obtain wisdom that the natural things of this world cannot impart, it must be by faith. And how shall we obtain faith? how shall the inhabitants of the earth begin to lay the foundation of faith in their hearts? They must take those steps ordained in the holy word of God—they must be born again, in order to obtain the spirit of truth, the light of truth, to become spiritual men and spiritual women, new creatures, as it were, having put off the natural man with all his evil deeds, having counted themselves, so far as natural wisdom and natural understanding and knowledge are concerned, but fools in the sight of God. For the wisest among the wise, those who have sought most earnestly and diligently to find out God, to understand his ways and to know him, without being born again have made shipwreck of themselves. Though they may attain to much earthly knowledge; though they may comprehend, in some small degree, that which is around them; though they may be able to comprehend, in some measure, by their learning and natural wisdom, mechanism of all kinds, that is calculated to benefit the children of men in a greater degree, though they may extend their natural knowledge into the heavens, and inquire into the mechanism of the universe, and into some of the plain laws that are discovered and made manifest, and consider them-

selves very learned and wise; yet, with all this, they are but fools before God, unless they have been born again, unless they have been filled with the spirit of light, unless they have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, unless they have been taught of God, unless they know God not by their natural wisdom, but by that wisdom that is inspired through the gift and power of the Holy Ghost shed forth upon them. These are everlasting truths; they were truths in the beginning when man was first placed on the earth. They have been truths in every succeeding generation, from the beginning of the history of man on our globe, until the present time. No man, therefore, from the day of Adam down to our day, has been in a condition, to be saved in the fulness of the glory of God, to dwell in his presence, without being born anew—his mind being renewed, his understanding being filled with the spirit of truth, and the whole man, as it were, both the spiritual man as well as the tabernacle in which he resides, being invigorated and quickened by the power of the Holy Ghost. It is a law, a fixed unchangeable law, which God ordained before he placed man on the earth, that that should be the way, and the only way, that man should know God, and know concerning heaven and heavenly things. Hence it is written: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." But our philosophers have labored with worldly wisdom to understand God. How they have toiled all the day long to comprehend his nature, to understand his ways, to discern his power, and to know concerning his existence. But all their labors have been in vain, so far as experiencing these things, according to the law of the Gospel is concerned.

But there have been dispensations of God to man, there have been periods since the creation of man, and his being on the earth, when mankind have placed themselves in communion with Jehovah, when they have fulfilled the laws, pertaining to this communion,—when they have prepared themselves to receive divine instruction and have been taught from on high, and such have known God. It is by faith that mankind put themselves in a condition to obtain this divine information, so desirable on the part of every good man, and every good woman. How shall we obtain this faith is the grand question? Can we obtain it by disobedience? No; in disobedience no man or woman, since the world began, has been able to obtain true and genuine faith before God, so far as he or she understands his word. How, for instance, in this the 19th century of the Christian era, shall mankind return to that faith which has been abundantly exercised by some of the human family, in past generations? It is by hearing the gospel, and then by obedience to that Gospel in all its principles, in all its ordinances, by obeying it with all their hearts in all sincerity, and meekness, and lowliness of heart, in other words, by comporting themselves like little children, whom the Savior on a certain occasion set forth as an example of those who shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. And he informs us that except we become by our repentance, by our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, by our diligence in serving him, as a little child, we can in no wise inherit the kingdom of heaven. Now, there is no deceit about a little child; it feels open-hearted and is without guile. It may have its little imperfections that have come into our fallen world; but its feelings are submissive, humble, ready to believe the teachings of its parents or guardians, unless it learns that they tell falsehoods. And then so far as their salvation is concerned, Satan has no power over them to destroy them, until they arrive at the years of understanding, and, this, by reason of the great redemption that has been wrought out, through the atoning blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. While, therefore, it is necessary for us to become like a little child in order to become worthy of so great a blessing, it is not necessary of course that we imitate it all respects. For instance it is not necessary that we should again begin to creep or lisp broken sentences, or imitate a great many other actions of the child; but it is essentially necessary that we become pure, without deceit, without guile and that we possess that humility which we see exhibited in the little child. And in that way we prepare our-

selves for the reception of the Spirit of God through obedience to his sacred and holy ordinances, repentance and baptism for the remission of the sins we have committed during all the days of our lives. And when we have received forgiveness of all past sins, we naturally feel anxious in our hearts to live a better and purer life, and sin no more. When having to rely upon ourselves—our fallen natures, we know how easily we yield to that which is sinful before God. We need something to strengthen us because of our fallen condition. We need strength imparted to our minds, to our bodies, to our intellect, to every power and faculty that God has given to us—something to strengthen us against all these little imperfections of our fallen natures. What is it? It is truth from heaven. How is that truth imparted? The gift and power of the Holy Ghost, sent forth from the bosom of the Father, through his well-beloved son, to quicken and regenerate our bodies, and our minds, and baptize us, as it were, with this renewing spirit, this spirit that animates, and quickens, and makes alive, that imparts light to the understanding, that makes manifest the things of God, and that no natural man can understand.

When we embraced the Gospel, we were promised this glorious gift to be with us, to dwell within us, to quicken our minds, to impart happiness and fill us with that love which surpasses all understanding, and to open up communication between us and the heavens, and make us acquainted with heavenly things, and heavenly beings, and not only give us to understand some few parts of the word of God, but reveal to us a knowledge of God himself, and, in some measure, his glorious power and his glorious economy and wisdom.

I have told you now, how to get faith: first believe in the first principles of the gospel of the Son of God as laid down in the Scriptures of truth, and revealed anew in this glorious record of ancient America, also revealed anew by the power of the Holy Ghost, sent down upon the great prophet and seer of the latter days—instructions from heaven, a voice from heaven, the glorious principles of eternal truth revealed from heaven, and made manifest to mortal man, not only in ancient times, but also in our day, clearly, plainly, distinctly, in such a manner that all may understand, that all may comprehend, that all may discern who receive the light, and who desire the light and who wish to walk in the light.

When we thus repent—when we thus reform—when we thus become like a little child, when we thus begin to put away our sins, when we thus feel to make our covenants with God, that we will serve him, that we will obey his gospel, that we will reform our lives, that we will be obedient to his word, that we will walk in newness of life—when we have done this, we are prepared then to have our former sins washed away through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, the plan of redemption that he has ordained. But we must be baptized in water; that is one of the conditions—for us to repent, for us to confess our sins to God, for us to pray to him, for us to promise to do better, and then if we are baptized by one having authority from Jesus Christ to minister in such ordinances, we may expect a remission of our sins. The Lord may, in some instances, forgive sins before an individual is baptized; he has done it, and he may do it. But the plan that he has ordained is to be baptized for the remission of sins, after faith and repentance. Why he does in some instances vary from the general plan is very evident, when we understand the circumstances connected with his doing so. For instance, the Lord has a set time to accomplish some of his great designs that he purposed in the beginning, in relation to the inhabitants of our globe; and when he begins to work, according to those set times, to fulfil his righteous purposes, he may commence, under certain circumstances, in a little different way from what he would do after the foundation is full laid; but when the plan is once laid, as it were, then he requires us to receive forgiveness in one way.

Now in the purposes of the Lord, he designed that after the Jews should have the Gospel preached to them by the apostles, that the apostles should then go to the Gentile nation, that they should proclaim it to those who were not of the seed of Abraham, that the Gentiles might be benefited as well as the Jews. But could the narrow contracted Jewish mind be convinced

after imbibing the traditions of their uninspired elders and priests, and after all the darkness that had reigned over Judea for some four centuries before Christ, could they be convinced that any other people were to be made partakers of the glorious Gospel of the Son of God, except themselves and their nation? They thought all the rest were unworthy scarcely of the crumbs which fell from their masters' table. We are the chosen people of God; we have the promises made to us, we are the people through whom the chosen Messiah is to come to reign universal, as a great king, to deliver us out of the hands of all other people; but as for you Gentiles, you are dogs. These were their traditions, and they considered it almost blasphemy for any one to go to the Gentiles. These feelings were deeply planted in the hearts of the Jews, in the land of Jerusalem; and after many of them had been baptized into the Church, these traditions remained with them, and the disciples did not fully understand the purposes of God, with regard to the Gentiles. And even Peter, the chief of the apostles, no doubt had his mind filled, more or less, with these prejudices, which were after those of the elders, chief priests and Pharisees; and in regard to a new revelation to convince him to the contrary, notwithstanding Jesus had stood before them in person, and commissioned them to go unto all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. But their minds were so beclouded by their traditions that they did not understand the true report nor the extent of the views of the Savior in giving this mission. Hence, it required farther testimony. A vision had to be given to Peter to show him that he might administer the Gospel to certain of the Gentiles, and to do it to, acceptably in the sight of God. But how should the Jewish brethren who were with Peter, who had been baptized into the Church, be convinced? They had no vision, and the same traditions weighed powerfully upon their minds that the Gentiles could not become partakers of these blessings. Peter visited Cornelius, taking with him six of his Jewish brethren, and they found him to be a man of understanding, a humble man, a prayerful man, a man whose prayers had ascended to heaven, and who was counted worthy to receive the administration of a holy angel. Yet, notwithstanding all his piety and worthiness he was not in a situation to be saved; but the angel told him to "send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." What a good thing for a pious man, a man whose prayers had ascended before God, a man whose alms-giving was acceptable to him and who could stand in the presence of any angel to have it marked out to him how he should be saved. According to the testimony, Cornelius had gathered in his kinsfolk, and Peter preached to him of a certain person that had been hated by all men, one that was looked upon as the offspring of all things, one that was called by the pious of Jerusalem as being a Sabbath-breaker, a wine-bibber, and of whom it was said that he cast out devils by the power of Beelzebub the prince of devils. Yet Peter told them that this same man was the Son of God, who had come to earth, in fulfillment of prophecy. And while Peter was speaking the Holy Ghost descended from heaven and fell upon Cornelius, and also upon those who were gathered together on that occasion, to hear his words. How do you know the Holy Ghost fell upon them? Because in that day, as in all other ages of the world, when people receive the Holy Ghost it is accompanied by light and power, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied, etc. But Peter did not stop there, he did not say to Cornelius, you are a very good man, and God has sent you an Angel, and favored you very highly, and you do not need anything else. But he commanded him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to be baptized. "What! need I to be baptized? What need I to receive the sacred ordinances? Am I not a good man? Have I not received the Holy Ghost? Why should I be baptized?" Because it was the only way that he could be saved. Supposing Cornelius had felt self-righteous, and had refused to obey the ordinances of the gospel? The consequence would have been that the Holy Ghost would have left him; the remission of sins, which he doubtless received, would no doubt

have been retained and reckoned against him, and would have to be met by him in the great judgment day; and he could not have been saved in the kingdom of God. Why? Because he would have disobeyed a plain command which was essential to his salvation. God did in this one instance, vary from the great plan of the gospel—he did impart the Holy Ghost before baptism. But it is promised by the law of the gospel to be given after baptism after the remission of sins. Receive the glorious promise made to the great assembled multitude on the day of Pentecost. "Repent," said Peter, "and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Now, can you misunderstand that? Is there a man, possessing ordinary powers of conception, who cannot comprehend language so plain? Repentance was enjoined upon them, as being the first requisite, for they had before heard of Jesus; if they had never heard about the Christ, the first thing would have been to have inspired them with faith, that Jesus was the Christ. But this the Apostles had already done, on the day of Pentecost; they had boldly declared that the very person whom the multitude had rejected, as an impostor, was both the Lord and Christ; they had proved to that assembled multitude that he was the great Messiah that should come for the redemption of the world. This assembly already believed, but they had not repented. They believed the fact; they believed it on evidence; they believed the testimony of the Apostles. This very belief on the part of the multitude inspired them to exclaim, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They believed that Jesus whom their nation had crucified was indeed the true Messiah, that their Jewish brethren had imbrued their hands in innocent blood; and believing that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Christ; hence their great desire to be told what to do, what was necessary to be done on their part, to be saved. And to this question Peter answered them in the language I have quoted, Repent, etc.

Thus you see that repentance follows faith. A great many will tell you to first repent and then believe, etc.; but every one can see that without faith in the Lord we could not repent. Could any man repent acceptably before God when he did not believe in Jesus Christ as his only begotten Son? And how could they believe without some evidence or testimony,—without some one to present to their mind sufficient evidence to convince them of the fact? Repentance follows faith; and when a person has connected repentance with faith, he is a fit candidate for baptism. And if he would receive the remission of his sins, he must be baptized in water—buried in water, which is termed by the Savior being "born of the water." When a person goes down into the water and is laid under the water, and comes forth out of the water, he is born from that element and it is after he is brought forth out of the watery element that he is entitled, according to the promise to receive the Holy Ghost. There are many people who believe that the Holy Ghost was to be bestowed only upon the people of ancient times; that it is not to be given in our day. But is not God the same in our day and is not his only begotten Son the same in our day? Has his gospel changed from what it was in ancient times? Was the gospel to be preached in one age of the world in one form, and then in some eighteen centuries afterwards to be preached in some other form? Is baptism by immersion the birth of the water, or is it merely sprinkling? Is it to be administered to persons because they have received the remission of their sins, or is it to be administered to persons because they have not received a remission of their sins. The gospel is plain; the language is plain; the ordinances are plain; the preaching is plain, and the plan of salvation so plain that "wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." The promise of the Holy Ghost was not confined to those assembled within the hearing of Peter on the day of Pentecost, but it was extended to their children and to all that were afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. It matters not, then, how far distant the people may reside on our globe; it matters not among what nation, or what grade, or class, whether the king upon his throne, or the beggar on the dung-hill, whether the sons of liberty or those who bow under