

## DISCOURSE

BY

PREST. GEORGE Q. CANNON,

DELIVERED

In the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City,  
on Sunday Afternoon, September  
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REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

We are living in a very peculiar age, and as a people we are doing a work which attracts the attention of mankind. Our name is known for good and evil in all lands. At no time in the history of mankind that we have any account of has there been a people of our number who have attracted as much attention and created as great an interest in the minds of the public as these have who live in these mountains and are known as "Mormons" or Latter-day Saints.

The age in which we live is one in which intelligence travels with great rapidity. Knowledge is communicated with ease, and by means of the newspaper, the telegraph wire, and the other facilities which the age affords, everything connected with us as a people is heralded from one end of the earth to the other in common with all the acts of the children of men. Unfortunately, however, with these facilities for the transmission of true knowledge, there are also equal facilities for the transmission of falsehood and misrepresentation. We have been the victims of falsehood and slander. Herculean efforts have been made to create false impressions concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church which our Father in heaven has established. It is well for us, however, that we have been prepared for this. In the commencement of this work of our God they who received it were warned of the character of the warfare that would be instituted against them. The Lord revealed in great plainness that it might cost them everything they held dear upon the earth, and that the warfare that would be waged against them would be one of unceasing hatred. These difficulties and trials, therefore have not come upon the people without some degree of preparation for them. The Lord gave the spirit of prophecy and revelation unto His servants and unto His people to prepare them for these events, and there is nothing that has yet taken place connected with this work of our God that has not been made manifest through the revelations which He has given. This has been a great cause of strength to the people and has prepared them to bear with some degree of equanimity and fortitude the trials and the afflictions to which they have been subjected. It is well for us that this has been the case. It is well for us, also, that accompanying the work of our God there has been a spirit of peace bestowed upon those who have espoused that work. If this had not been the case how unfortunate our lot would have been! How unbearable! We could never have endured that which we have been called to pass through had there not been this spirit of peace that God promised in the beginning to bestow upon us. I doubt myself whether there can be found anywhere within the confines of the globe another people living in greater peace, in the enjoyment of more happiness, pure happiness, than can be found in these valleys from north to south. While all manner of evil has been spoken against the Latter-day Saints, while our names have been everywhere cast out as evil, God has given compensation to us by bestowing upon us these blessings to which I have referred.

It is well for us to look at the circumstances which surround us and to take a proper survey of all the events that lie before us, that are likely to take place in the future connected with us. God has given unto us the truths. This we have received accompanied by abundant testimonies. Those who have entered into covenants with God, who have gone down into the waters of baptism in obedience to His requirements, submitting to the ordinances that He has instituted for salvation, and have done this in sincerity and with purity of purpose, have received for themselves testimonies from God respecting the divinity of the work with which they have become identified. It is of the utmost importance that we should cherish this spirit and feeling, that it should be with us constantly in our movements, in every act of our lives, and that we should so live that the Holy Ghost will rest down in power and in testimony upon us. It is not only necessary that those who stand at the head should know for themselves concerning this work, its divinity and the purposes of God connected with it, but that every member, however humble and obscure, should in like manner receive of that spirit and enjoy its presence and its power, have its gifts resting down upon him or her. Each member should stand as a living witness of the truth that the Father has revealed, and which each of us who have complied with His requirements have received.

God has placed us here upon the earth to accomplish important purposes. These purposes have been in part revealed unto us. Probably it is not possible for men and women in this mortal state of existence to comprehend all the designs of God connected with man's existence upon the earth; but much has been revealed upon this subject to us as a people. In

his respect, if in no other, the Latter-day Saints should be the happiest, the most contented, the most joyous of all people that live; for not only has the knowledge of the past been communicated to us, but the present, that which is connected with our probation here, and also much knowledge concerning the future.

Now, if a man can only know whence he came, why he is here, and that which awaits him after this life, it seems to me that he has abundant causes of happiness within his grasp. Much of the unhappiness and uncertainty that prevail to-day in the minds of mankind arise from ignorance upon these points. Hence, we see the course that many of the children of men are taking. If a man knew exactly why God sent him here, the object that He had in giving unto him a mortal existence, do you think that men or women who had this knowledge would be guilty of suicide, would have any disposition to cut off their own existence, and to destroy that gift which God in His mercy has given unto us? I certainly think not. I do not believe that any human being who properly comprehends the object that God has had in placing man here upon the earth, and who has a desire to carry out that purpose, would ever attempt self-destruction. He would shrink from such an act with horror, and would never dare to destroy the earthly tabernacle given him by God. In these respects, as I have said, we possess rare advantages. It is a great favor from God to have this light. There is no unwillingness on His part to communicate it; but there is an unwillingness on the part of the children of men to receive it when it is communicated.

The Bible tells us we came from God. The Bible tells us He is the Father of our spirits. How is He the Father of our spirits? This is an important question, and one that each of us should endeavor to understand. I think it is of the utmost importance that the Latter-day Saints should understand and be able to comprehend this question thoroughly; because upon the proper understanding of this, must, to a great extent, depend their actions in this life.

It has been argued that because we have no recollection of any previous state of being, our existence must, therefore, have commenced at our birth—that that was the inception of existence so far as we are concerned. This is the general belief throughout Christendom. No body of worshippers who call themselves Christians, that we have any account of, have any belief in a pre-existent state for man. They consider his birth into mortality as the beginning of life for him. Yet the belief is universal among them that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Redeemer of the world, had a pre-existence. It is the corner stone of their faith. If Jesus did not have life till He appeared in mortality, then their faith in Him is vain, for He would not be God. But they profess to believe that He is God, the Son; that He dwelt in the heavens and was the Creator of all things before He took upon Himself humanity. In believing this they are correct. But why they should be willing to believe this concerning our elder brother Jesus, and at the same time be unwilling to believe that the whole family of man also existed in the heavens with the Father before they came here, is not clear. Those who saw the Savior while in mortality saw nothing in Him to distinguish Him particularly from other mortals. Doubtless those who were enlightened by the Spirit of God could perceive evidences of His superiority over ordinary men, and of His divinity. But did Pilate? Did the Pharisees and Scribes? In the eyes of the latter classes He was a common man and a vulgar impostor who deserved an ignominious death. His divine glory was veiled from mortal eyes. Would any one have suspected from the appearance of the Savior, from His teachings, from His treatment of His disciples, that He differed so widely from them as to be of an entirely distinct species? Certainly not. He taught to them and to others the great doctrine of equality. If they would obey certain laws, conform to certain requirements, they were to be His equals, that is, be one with Him, as He would be one with the Father. In this teaching He offended the Jews. Their dislike to these ideas of His, found expression in the words: "that thou being a man, makest thyself God." His disciples had the right to think, from all that He taught, that if He had been with the Father before coming into this mortal life, they also had been there. If they were to be so closely associated with Him in the great future what was there to suggest to them that they had not been intimately connected with Him in the past? If He had been chosen from before the foundation of the earth to do the work which He was then doing, what inconsistency would there be in their being chosen also, as His ministers and associates, at the same time? To look at them as they traveled and labored together throughout Jewry there was nothing unreasonable in the idea of their common origin.

The Lord Jesus was undoubtedly selected for the great mission of redeeming the world, because of His great qualities and His peculiar fitness as one of the Godhead. It is written of Him: "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Were not all the distinguished of heaven's sons there—they who afterwards made their appearance on the earth as Prophets,

Apostles and righteous men? If He was chosen above all His fellows, and anointed with the oil of gladness, is it not consistent and reasonable to suppose that His faithful Apostles were also chosen and anointed to perform their part in the great drama of human existence for the enactment of which the earth was to be prepared? If He had companions in the heavens, or to use the language of the Scriptures—"fellows," is it reasonable to suppose that He left them there while He came down here and took upon Himself mortality? Does it violate in the least any idea that we derive from the sacred records, to think that His "fellows" also came here, and, as He did, also obtained mortal tabernacles?

If we grant that His "fellows" in the heavens came here, as He did, and obtained mortal bodies, what shall we say of the undistinguished millions who have crowded their way forward into mortal life from the beginning? Shall we divide humanity into classes, and say one class had a heavenly existence before coming here, while another class sprung into existence at mortal conception or birth? If we are not justified, by either Scripture or reason, in placing the Redeemer of the world in a class by Himself, so far as pre-existence is concerned, and in separating Him in this respect from His "fellows," how can we find warrant for dividing the rest of the family of God, into two classes—one as having a pre-existence, and another as not having any life till they arrive here?

If it were possible for the Lord Jesus to descend from the mansions of glory and take possession of a mortal tabernacle, and be born of a woman in the shape of an infant, is it not equally possible that we all did the same? Everything that we know concerning the mystery of this life justifies us in thus believing. But we are not left to speculation upon this point. God has revealed this in great plainness. The Bible proves to us that Jesus existed with the Father, and that He descended from His high estate in the regions of glory to become a mortal man; for He speaks Himself in praying to the Father, of the glory He had with the Father before He came here, that glory having been revealed to Him. Now, is there anything difficult or incomprehensible in the thought, that we all in like manner, existed with the Father, and with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ before we came here? The Lord in speaking to Jeremiah reveals to him in great plainness that he had a pre-existence. In the first chapter of Jeremiah, He tells him that before he was formed in the womb He knew him, that He chose him to be a Prophet, that he had been designated for the work that he had to accomplish; and thousands of others among mankind have felt—though they knew nothing by recollection of their previous existence—that they were called and designated and destined to accomplish great works upon the earth.

The revelations that have been given unto us as a people have communicated this doctrine unto us. We are taught in the record of Abraham, which has been translated and given unto us, that prior to man's coming upon the earth, he had an existence with the Father, and that we all, all the inhabitants of the earth, every man and woman and child that has ever been born upon the earth, or that ever will be born on the earth—have had an existence with the Father before coming here.

With these views that I have endeavored to set before you we can have some understanding concerning the object of man being placed upon the earth. If we are the children of our God, then God our Eternal Father has had an object, a great object to accomplish in placing us here on the earth. Jesus had a mission to perform. He came and took upon Himself mortality. A mortal probation was assigned Him. It was a part of the plan of salvation, not only connected with His exaltation, but with the redemption of the human family. There has been a purpose in all this. This earth has been created for a purpose. Man is here for a purpose. Death is in the world for a purpose just as much as life, and all these are a part of the Divine plan connected with man's existence in the past, at the present and for the future.

A great many have stumbled and have questioned the justice of our God, and have also gone so far as to question the very existence of God, because of the earthly circumstances which surround the children of men. It has been said by those who have taken this view that if there were an all-powerful Being, such as God is described to be, He would interpose in behalf of the children of men, and deliver them from the trying scenes and circumstances which they frequently have to pass through. The fact that man is in such a condition and is surrounded by such circumstances is frequently urged as an evidence that there is no God, that there can be no God, possessing such attributes as are ascribed to Him by those who believe in Him. Many people have been deluded by this kind of reasoning; they have become infidels, and rejected all belief in God and in any providence connected with man and with man's existence upon the earth. They have abandoned themselves to complete unbelief upon this point. But those who have sought after God, those who have humbled themselves before Him and obtained knowledge from Him in the way that He has appointed—though to them all may not be perfectly plain—do perceive and acknowledge the providence of God in all the circumstances which surround them. They perceive His hand and acknowledge it in all the events connected with their mortal existence, and with the mortal existence of their fellows.

God has had a purpose in withdrawing Himself from man; it has not been a part of His purpose to reveal Himself in His fulness, in His glory, in His power, unto His children upon the earth. Many, not understanding why this should be, and unable to comprehend any purpose in it, have stumbled and yielded to doubts and been ready, because of this, to deny His existence. Now, it has been a part of the plan of salvation, as revealed in all the records that have come down to us from the beginning—from the days of our Father Adam, and now—it is part of the plan of salvation, I say, connected with man's existence upon the earth that God should thus withdraw Himself, as it were, from man, and that a veil should be drawn between himself and man, and that if knowledge of Him be obtained it should be obtained by the exercise of great faith and continued labor on the part of His children. But why, it may be asked, is this necessary? Why is it that God has not revealed himself with great fulness and power unto all the inhabitants of the earth and left them in complete possession of all the knowledge necessary to prove to them that He is God? Questions of this kind are frequently propounded by men. They ask: why does He not reveal himself fully to His creatures? Why should he leave them a prey to doubt? Why should he leave them in darkness? Why should he give opportunities to the adversary of their souls to assail them as he does for want of that knowledge which He might communicate so easily? These are important questions, and they are questions which as Latter-day Saints we should understand.

We must remember, to begin with, that God our Eternal Father has given unto each of us our agency. There is no human being born on the earth from whom God has withheld his or her agency. We have as much right to exercise our agency in our sphere as God the Eternal Father has to exercise His agency in His sphere; just as much. It is not sacrilege, it is not any infringement upon the power of our God to indulge in this thought or to have this belief. It does not detract in the least from His glory, from His power, nor from our dependence upon Him as an infinite and almighty Being to entertain this view of ourselves. Jesus said when He was upon the earth: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." How could we be if man did not have the power within him, through the agency which God has given him, to be thus perfect? Everywhere throughout the divine record where God has communicated His mind and His will to men, this principle is plainly manifest: that man has had given unto him, in the greatest freedom and without limit, the power to exercise his own agency. It was so in the beginning—in the very commencement of the work of our God upon the earth when He placed Adam in the garden and gave Eve unto him for a wife. He set before them the principle of knowledge—that is, He told them what they should do; He told them what they should refrain from doing. He told them that if they did certain things, certain penalties should follow. Had such a thing been possible and consistent with the purposes of Heaven, He might, at the very beginning, have prevented Adam from exercising His agency. Instead of saying to him, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat except the tree of knowledge of good and evil," and leaving him free to eat of the fruit of that tree, He might have put it out of his power to touch or taste it. But not so; He gave him the opportunity of exercising his agency; He told him he could eat of every tree freely, except the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but that he should not eat of it, "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." There was no attempt on the part of our Father to interfere with the agency of Adam in this respect. He left him perfectly free, and in the exercise of that freedom Adam did partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. His wife, Eve, was deceived in eating of the fruit; she partook of it, being beguiled, yet in the perfect exercise of her agency, and after she had partaken of it and become subject to the penalty that God had pronounced—the penalty of death and expulsion from the garden—then she came and told Adam what she had done. Adam was fully conscious of all the consequences that had attended this act. He knew perfectly well that the penalty would be executed—that Eve had become mortal, that death had entered into her tabernacle, and the penalty that God had pronounced would be fully executed; that she would be thrown out of the garden and that they would be separated forever—that is, so far as this life was concerned. He knew this, and, fully conscious of all the consequences which should follow his partaking of the fruit, he partook of it. In doing so he was not deceived. He partook of it because of his desire to fulfill the commandments of God. God had given unto him this woman for a wife; they were bound together by immortal ties; but because of this act of hers there must necessarily have been a separation that would have endured as long as her mortal life endured. Adam understanding this, partook of the fruit, and as is said by the Prophet Lehi, "Adam felt that man might be, and men are that they may have joy." If he had not fallen; if he had not partaken of that fruit, there would have been no human race on the earth. He understood this, therefore he partook of it and accompanied his wife. It was a part of the plan that was understood in the heavens before Adam was placed

in the garden. God by His foreknowledge understood perfectly that Adam, in the exercise of his agency, would fall. Therefore, He prepared a Redeemer in the person of His Son Jesus Christ, who we are told was "a lamb slain from before the foundation of the world." God having seen that Adam would fall, that death would come upon him, and that a Redeemer would be necessary in order to redeem man from the effects of the fall, for unless there had been a Redeemer provided Adam and all his posterity would have slept an eternal sleep, they would have been consigned to the tomb, and there would have been no redemption therefrom because of the penalty that had been pronounced upon the Father upon him if he committed this act—God knowing all this provided a Redeemer. That Redeemer was the Son of God, Jesus our Savior, in whose name we all approach the Father, in whose name salvation is given unto the children of men. It was arranged beforehand that He should come and perform His mission in the meridian of time—lay down His life, as it was known that He would do through the wickedness of bad men.

Now, it may be said, why did not God prevent man and woman from taking this course? Because, as I have before said, it was right that they should exercise their agency, and shall I say could not? Do I detract from His majesty and His glory by placing a limit on His power? Will say that God would not, because it would be in violation of His own law it would be in violation of those eternal laws which our God himself recognizes, for Him to have interfered and deprived man and woman of the agency. But, knowing the consequences of their actions, He prepared a way for their salvation and their redemption, and thus it is that we were born on the earth. It was part of the design that we should be subjected to all these afflictions and trials and to deal with that belong to this mortal state of existence. This was part of the plan.

I have been told by objectors that God ought to reveal himself in fulness. Why does He not do it? Because if He were to do so we should be deprived of the opportunities of proving our integrity which we now have. He has marked out the path for us to walk; He has designed that we shall struggle; that we shall exercise faith that we shall contend with the temptations of the adversary; that we shall overcome evil; and by a continued exercise of faith progress in the commandments that He has assigned to us. It is absolutely necessary that we should be tempted and tried in order that we should receive the glory that he has store for us. What would our salvation amount to; what would heaven amount to if we had never been tried if we were to be placed in heaven without trial, without effort, without contention upon our part to overcome and to contend with those influences that abound in this mortal state of existence. It would not be such a heaven as God inhabits and such a heaven as He designs that all His children should inhabit. For let me say to you, brethren and sisters, God designs that we shall be like Him. He designs that His children shall attain unto the head—that is if they will obey the commandments that He has given, necessary to bring them up to that exaltation, and before they can attain unto that, before they can enjoy that before they can be in a condition to appreciate that, they must pass through just such scenes of trial and tribulation and affliction as we are subjected to in this mortal condition of existence.

There is an interesting passage in the new translation of the Bible, the Pearl of Great Price, that I have often been struck with. It shows clearly the feelings of our first parents after they had been thrust out of the garden of Eden. I will read a paragraph or two:

"And Adam called upon the name of the Lord, and God also, his wife, they heard the voice of the Lord, for the way towards the garden of Eden speaking unto them, and they saw the Lord, for they were shut out from His presence."

That was one of the consequences of the fall. They were shut out, and have been from that time to this shut out from the presence of the Father.

"And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flock, for an offering unto the Lord. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord."

"And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying, Were not for our transgression we never should have seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the life of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient."

"And Adam and Eve blessed the name of God, and they made all things known unto their sons and daughters. Now, this couple blessed God because of their transgression. Their eyes were opened; they had become as Gods; for the devil, in tempting Eve had told a truth when he said unto her that when she should eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil she should become as Gods. He told the truth in telling that, but he accompanied it with a lie as he always does. He never tells the complete truth. He said that they should not die. The Father had said that they should die. The devil had said that they should die in order to accomplish his purposes; but there was some truth in his statement. Their eyes were opened. They had a know-