

DISCOURSE

BY

BISHOP ORSON F. WHITNEY

DELIVERED

In the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Sunday Afternoon, June 21, 1885.

REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

HAVING been called upon, my brethren and sisters and friends, to address you this afternoon, I feel as though I would like to read a portion of the word of God. I will therefore read to you a part of the 14th chapter of the Book of Revelations, from the Bible known as King James' translation.

And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him a hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders; and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.

Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

It has been charged to the Latter-day Saints that they set but little value upon the Christian Bible; that they criticize its translation and the revisions through which it has passed, and that it is our endeavor to belittle the importance of this holy book. The words which I have read are a portion of that sacred record which we are charged with undervaluing, and I choose them as a basis for my remarks in order to show how groundless is that charge, with many others, which are made falsely against this people. The words you have heard include a prophecy uttered some 1800 years ago by an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, one of the Twelve whom He chose in the days of His personal ministry upon the earth. He had delivered unto them the keys of the kingdom of heaven, promising them that whatsoever they bound on earth should be bound in heaven; whatsoever they loosed upon earth should be loosed in heaven; whosoever sins they should remit should be remitted, and whosoever sins they should retain should be retained. He gave them power to go forth to all nations and preach the Gospel of life and salvation, telling them among the last things he said that, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned;" and that certain signs should follow them that believed. The Apostles went forth baptizing in the name of the Lord, and confirmed His word by signs following.

On a certain occasion, towards the close of the career of the Son of God in the flesh, His disciples asked him if He would at that time restore the Kingdom to Israel, and what would be the signs of His second coming and of the end of the world? Among other things He told them that this Gospel of the Kingdom should be preached in all the world as a witness unto all nations and then should the end come. The Apostles set out upon the mission which had been given them, and we read in the Acts of the Apostles, and in their Epistles contained within the lids of this holy book, of the adventures which befell them and the persecutions which they endured. It had been said of them by their Lord and Master, that they should be hated of all men for His name's sake; but "blessed are ye," said He, "when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." And the day would come, He said, when they that put His disciples to death would think they were doing God's service.

Thus were the minds of the Apostles prepared for the fate which afterwards befell them. They embraced the truth, knowing that it might cost them their lives; for they had been told that if a man loved his life, or loved earthly possessions of any kind more than he did his God, more than he loved the work of that God, he was in no wise fit for His kingdom. They went into it with their eyes open; they knew what would befall them; but being men of integrity, men who loved truth, who based themselves upon principle, and thought more of doing the will of Him who sent them than they did of doing their own, they embraced their glorious mission and were willing even to lay down their lives for the sake of that Kingdom for which they were laboring. Their expectations were fulfilled. The truth was not popular. Although devils were subject to these men, although they performed mighty

miracles in the name of Jesus, yet they were despised, persecuted or ignored by the great mass of humanity. A few believed in their words; a few rejoiced exceedingly that the Church of God was established on the earth; that the Savior who had been promised as a lamb slain before the foundation of the world, had at last come in fulfillment of the prophecies of old. Their minds were prepared to receive Him, and they rejoiced in the work of God. Churches were formed in different lands. The Apostles went forth from Jerusalem, after they had been "endued with power from on high," and built up churches in many of the surrounding nations, perhaps in all the nations that then existed. But although they were successful in planting the tree of life upon the soil of a fallen world, it seems that the time had not come for it to remain there and bear fruit throughout the ages of eternity. It was destined to be uprooted, and there was to come another time when the truth should be replanted once more, and should bear the fruits of righteousness forever. The glory of God was not destined in that day to cover the earth, as He has said it would in the latter days, "as the waters cover the mighty deep." The Apostles labored faithfully; they went forth baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost; but the power of sin, the power of the evil one was so great that it did not please the Almighty to establish upon the earth in that day a work which should endure forever. He permitted it for a wise purpose to be thrown down, and of this fact we are well assured by the prophecies of the Apostles which they have left on record. Paul, one of the most faithful laborers in the vineyard of our Lord in that day, said the time would come when the people would not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts should heap unto themselves teachers, and having itching ears, should turn away their ears from the truth, and should be turned unto fables.

If we follow the history of the Apostles, we will see how their words were fulfilled. Nearly every one of the Twelve whom Jesus chose, met with a tragic death in defence of the principles which they proclaimed. Some were dragged to death, some beheaded, one was crucified with his head downward, others were thrown into cauldrons of boiling oil and others to wild beasts; so that at the end of the second century after Christ, the Church of God in its purity no longer existed upon the face of the earth. It had been torn asunder; it had apostatized from the truth; they who were faithful had been put to death, and in their place sprang up a race of compromisers, who were willing to barter away to the world the principles of truth, being too weak and cowardly to stand and die for their convictions as their fellow laborers had done. They were willing to give up this principle, and concede that point, to amalgamate for the purpose of making them popular and palatable the doctrines of the pure Christian faith with the pagan ideas of ancient Rome. So that the temporal body of Christ, the Church, became corrupt, deformed by this departure from first principles. Apostles, prophets were done away with; spiritual gifts became extinct and were said to be no longer needed: Bishops were put into the places of Apostles, and a multitude of new offices, unknown to the original church, were created. Finally two Bishops appeared, the Bishop of Rome and the Bishop of Constantinople, contending as to which was the greatest, and striving, in a church professing to regard unity and brotherly love, to divide the dominions of the Christian world between them. More attention was paid to outward forms, to grand and imposing ceremonies, than to the simple beautiful principles of the Gospel, and in course of time were fulfilled the words of Isaiah, who said that they would "transgress the law, change the ordinances, and break the everlasting covenant." The result of this wide-spread departure, this apostasy from the primitive faith, was the withdrawal of the power of the Priesthood, typified by the "man-child" of the Apocalypse, which was taken into the heavens to preserve it from the mouth of the Dragon which sought its life; there to remain until a more auspicious time should arrive for the establishment of the work of God and the winding up of the great plan of human redemption.

But one of these original Apostles was left. The Latter-day Saints are taught that Jesus, on a certain occasion, speaking to the Twelve, wished to bestow upon them each a gift, to grant the desire of their hearts, and He asked them what they would He should do for them. They all but one requested to be taken home to Him in heaven when they should have filled the allotted age of man. But one turned away sorrowful, feeling that the wish he cherished in his heart was too great to be granted. Peter asked the Savior, "What shall this man do?" and received the reply, "If I will that he tarry till I come what is that to thee?" "Then went this saying abroad among the brethren that that disciple should not die." It is vaguely given, I admit, in the Bible from which I have quoted, but modern revelations have made it plainer, and shown us that the Apostle, John obtained a promise from the Savior that he should remain upon the earth to witness the downfall and the rise of nations, that he should live to perform a mighty mission in the midst of the children of men; that he should prophecy before kings and rulers, and should tarry upon the earth until the

Son of God came in His glory. This Apostle was the only one who escaped the tragic fate of his fellows. He was the only one of the original Twelve who was not put to death. An attempt was made upon his life by throwing him into a cauldron of boiling oil, but, he escaped miraculously, and his enemies, not having the power to put him to death, banished him to the desert island of Patmos. It was during his exile upon this lonely spot, that God condescended to reveal to him what should come to pass in the last days, and the book which is called the Apocalypse is a record which the Apostle left of the great things that were shown him, and which he should remain upon the earth to see. An angel appeared unto him; John mistook him, it seems, for the Lord, and fell down at his feet to worship him, his person was so glorious. But the angel reproved him and said, "See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant and of thy brethren the prophets." Here was one of the prophets who had been slain for the testimony of Jesus, who was so glorious when he appeared that John, who perhaps had labored with him, did not recognize him. He had been sent unto him to show him what should come to pass thereafter.

But not only was John shown what should occur after the time in which he was living, but he was shown what had already taken place; not as the imperfect records of profane history have given it to us, but he saw it typified in its fullness. The events of the seven thousand years of the world's temporal existence passed before him, like the scenes of a mighty panorama. If you will read the book which he left, you will there find portrayed symbolically each of the seven thousand years. He saw the events which had followed the creation down until one period had passed; he then saw the events of the second thousand years, or until two periods had passed; and then the third and the fourth periods, at the end of which Jesus came as the Savior of mankind, to perform a personal work in the flesh. John saw, further, the events of the fifth thousand years. He saw the great apostasy that was to take place in the Christian church, when they put to death every inspired man; when they did away with the gifts and blessings of the Holy Ghost; when they said they were no longer necessary; when they engrafted upon the olive tree of the Christian faith the wild branches of paganism. He saw all this taking place down to the sixth thousand years, and after the world had wandered in darkness, for centuries, he says:

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation and kindred, and tongue, and people."

"Saying with a loud voice, fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

Showing conclusively, as well as language can show, that this was to be an event of the last days—the hour of God's judgment, which Christianity itself, in its perverted state, will admit is at the end of the world. John saw the angel restoring the Gospel shortly before the hour of God's judgment, saying with a loud voice to all nations, kindreds, tongues and peoples—not only to the heathen nations, but to those who professed to have the true Christian faith—"Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of his judgment is come." This to us is another proof of the apostasy of the Christian world; for if they had the truth, as they claim, by apostolic succession, from St. Peter down to the present day—what need of restoring the Gospel in its fullness to preach to them? It would be superfluous, unnecessary, a work of supererogation, to preach to those who were living in the full blaze of Gospel light, and call upon them to repent of their sins.

I never like to wound people's feelings in regard to religious matters. I never like to have my own feelings wounded. I try to have charity for the sincere sentiments of all men; but it is needful that the truth be spoken in plainness. It is no act of friendship to flatter, to deceive and to gloss over error, when by exposing it the souls of some honest people may be saved. The Latter-day Saints erect a nobler structure before they tear down that which is old. They do not wish to ridicule the opinions of their fellow creatures; it should never be done except where good will be the result. All men have the right to believe as they please. They have a right to worship where, how and what they please. God has made us free. We are in bondage to no man, to no power. His children, from the rising to the setting of the sun, have been made free. Therefore I do not feel to ridicule the religion of my Christian friends; but I desire to lay before them and before this congregation the religion of the Latter-day Saints. We claim that the Christian world is in a state of apostasy, and though thousands and millions of them are perfectly sincere—just as sincere in their belief as we are in ours—still, it devolves upon me as a servant of God to preach what I know to be the truth, and you can take your choice whether you accept or reject it. The responsibility ends with me here; it is assumed by those who listen, who can act as they feel led; they will be accountable whether they give heed to the warning message, or whether they ignore and reject it.

At any rate, John saw the time when an angel would come and restore the everlasting Gospel—not another Gospel,

not various kinds of gospels, not the precepts and fables of men, but the good, old, "sound doctrine" of ancient times. The Gospel of Christ in its fullness was to be preached to all the nations of the earth. What for? To fulfil the prediction of the Son of God, who said that "this Gospel of the kingdom"—that Gospel which had Apostles to preach it, and Prophets; which had gifts and miracles and signs following; a Gospel of faith, repentance, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and other principles to be revealed one after another as fast as the people were able to receive them—that this old original Gospel of the kingdom should come back to the earth to be preached as a witness unto all nations, and then should the end come.

That these are the last days very few people will deny. The earth has almost fulfilled its mortal probation, its working time. It is closing the sixth thousand years of its temporal history. It has worked nearly six days; for "a day with the Lord is as a thousand years." When God said to Adam, "in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," He did not mean a short day of twenty-four hours, a day made by one revolution of the little earth upon which we dwell, but it was a day of a thousand years, corresponding to one revolution of the great and mighty planet upon which God our Father dwells. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Adam lived to the age of 930 years, so that he died within the day that God had reference to. The earth has labored nearly six days—six days of one thousand years each. It is yet to have its sabbath, its millenium of peace, when the Savior of the world will come to take the reins of government, to reign upon the earth King of kings as He now reigns King of Saints; the seventh period, whose dawn is almost upon us, is the sabbath, the day of rest which God has ordained for the planet upon which we live, and He will celebrate that sabbath by coming in person to reign upon the earth over all nations. It is for this that the Latter-day Saints are preparing; having fulfilled, as the instruments of God, the prediction of John the Revelator; an angel in this day having restored the Gospel, which is now being preached as a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.

It is a merciful characteristic of our Heavenly Father that He brings to pass upon the human family no event affecting their eternal welfare, but He first sends Prophets to prepare the way, to give the people a warning that such and such things are coming to pass, that they may be prepared for them and not be caught napping by the suddenness of their coming, even as a thief in the night. We read that as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the coming of the Son of Man. What was done in the days of Noah? A prophet—Noah himself—was raised up and sent forth to preach a warning message to the children of men. What was his warning? That the world was about to be deluged. Its sins had cried unto heaven, and God had remembered its iniquities. He was about to baptise the earth in water, to wash away its sins, that they should no longer smoke to heaven, an offering of wrath to an offended God. Noah preached this warning, and, as usual, was met with ridicule and scorn. Never did a prophet come forth that was not ridiculed and persecuted, and the message that he proclaimed considered foolishness by the wisdom of the world. But how did it result? Did the superior (?) wisdom of the world in that day save them from the truth of the words of Noah? Or did God stand by that prophet? Did He make good his words? Did He drown the world? Did He sweep the wicked from its surface? History will tell you what took place. It seems that Noah and the few souls that clung to him were right, and the world at large were in the wrong. Noah had really received a revelation from God. He was pointed at, despised and derided, doubtless called visionary and fanatic, an old fool, or anything else; but he had received a revelation and God made good the words which he proclaimed.

The earth underwent a baptism by being immersed in water, for the remission of its sins, the washing away of its iniquities. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the coming of the Son of Man." Is the world to be deluged in water again? No; because God gave a promise to Noah and set his bow in the clouds as a sign that the world should never again be drowned in water; but in the day of the coming of the Son of Man it will receive the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. John the Baptist said: "There cometh one mightier than I, after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." Not only man, but the earth itself, which is a living creature, must undergo this ordinance—this dual baptism, and Jesus, when He comes in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, to take vengeance upon those who know not God, who have not sought to know Him, who have persecuted his people, and set aside the Gospel as a thing of naught, will deluge the earth with fire and the Holy Ghost. Then will the Scriptures be fulfilled which say that the glory of God shall radiate from the rivers to the ends of the earth.

Now is the all. The earth and its

elements will melt, as Peter the Apostle said, "with fervent heat, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts." These things are coming to pass. God only has to turn upon this world the glory of His presence to consume it from before His face and cause it to vanish like chaff in a flame. We are not prepared for the glory of His coming. But this work which has been established in our day, is one that will prepare us for His glorious advent. All who believe and are baptized into this Church have been promised the gift of the Holy Ghost. What is the Holy Ghost? It is the Spirit of God. God dwells in the pure element of fire; it is the atmosphere which the holy angels, the spirits of the just, the Gods in eternity breathe and live within, but which would consume us if we came to suddenly upon it, or it upon us. We must needs approach it gradually. We read that in the days of Moses, when God wished to commune with him, He called him up into a high mountain, and filled him with the Holy Ghost. Moses, therefore could endure His presence; but when he came down from the Mount his face shone like an angel's, and he had to put a veil upon it lest the children of Israel should be consumed before him. This shows what we may expect when God comes in the clouds of heaven, if we do not rid ourselves of iniquity and prepare our souls to meet Him. But ere that day comes there shall be wars and rumors of wars, thunders and lightnings, famines and pestilences; the sea shall heave itself beyond its bounds, and all things shall be in commotion; the sun shall be darkened, the moon shall be turned to blood, and the stars shall fall from heaven like figs from off a fig tree. The judgments of God shall stalk through the earth, decimating the human race, before the great day of the Lord shall come.

Are we to suppose that in a day like this, when such mighty and terrible things are coming upon the earth, God would leave the world in darkness; that he would shut the heavens, as our Christian friends say He has done; and send forth no more prophets to prepare us for these great events which are at our doors? I for one would have a very poor opinion of a God who would leave His children in that cruel manner. But the God we worship is just and merciful. He never brings upon the earth any judgment but He sends first a warning message to prepare the people for its coming.

This is our warning to-day—that the Gospel of the kingdom is being preached unto all nations as a witness, and then the hour of God's judgment, or the predicted end of the world shall come. It is a message of mercy, not one of anger, not one of cruelty. It is not cruel to tell men the truth. If we see a man on the brink of a precipice and tell him that if he takes another step forward he will be dashed to pieces, is that cruelty, or is it charity of the truest kind? It may humiliate him to be told of his danger; it may cast reflection upon his eyesight; he may not see the precipice; men do not always see things which are immediately near them; they who are at a distance sometimes observe the danger first and give warning. It is not uncharitable, it is not intolerant to tell men the truth; we must sometimes be cruel in order to be kind; and hurt men's feelings if necessary in order to save their souls. I do not mean the saving of their souls by the killing of their bodies. Heretics used to be punished on that theory. The object of "Mormonism" is to save the body and the spirit, which together constitute the soul.

This is the message we bring, the olive branch that we extend to the world, and for so doing we are despised and persecuted and trampled upon. But we know that we need expect no different fate from that which our predecessors have experienced. They laid down their lives in preaching this same Gospel. We must be willing to lay down ours, if need be, to establish these truths upon the earth.

God does not punish except to save. He never chastens except to purify. In sweeping the antediluvian races from the earth, it was an act of mercy to them, that they might not add sin to sin and heap up iniquity until they could not have been pardoned. He swept them off when their cup was full, and imprisoned their spirits while their bodies moldered in the grave. Jesus, however, while His body was lying in the tomb, went and preached to the spirits in prison; those who rejected the message that was offered to them by Noah, and were swept away by the flood. So it will be in this day, if this message is rejected; God will bring judgments upon the world until he has humbled the people to a state where they will be glad to receive it. He says to His Elders: Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature; and after your testimony, comes the testimony of earthquakes and tempests, of thunders and lightnings, of the sea heaving itself beyond its bounds, of wars and rumors of wars, of famine and pestilence. Says He, the time shall come when he that will not take up his sword against his neighbor must needs flee unto Zion for safety, for there shall be gathered to it of every nation under heaven, and they shall be the only people who are not at war one with another.

It is that the world may escape these terrible judgments and plagues that will desolate the wicked, that we put our lives and liberties in jeopardy in