

DISCOURSE

BY

PRESIDENT JOHN TAYLOR

In the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City,
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REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

We have had a very interesting Conference, and a great many thoughts, ideas and reflections have been presented to the people in a clear and pointed manner, and I have been pleased to see the unanimity and harmony that have existed in our midst. And while I attempt to speak to you I shall ask an interest in your prayers that I may be strengthened to perform the labor. It is difficult for a people to understand and to retain everything that may be said in a Conference like this, where there are so many subjects dwelt upon and so many principles enunciated; but it is a great blessing for us that we are situated as we are, and that we possess the intelligence which has been communicated from time to time. Many great and precious principles having been revealed unto us, it becomes necessary for us to try to comprehend them, that we may understand the position we occupy before God, before the world in which we live, and before the intelligences that exist behind the veil in the eternal worlds. We have a great and important mission committed unto us, and it is for us to seek to comprehend that mission and fulfill the various duties and responsibilities devolving upon us. The Lord has given unto us a form of government, an organization, priesthood and authority to enable us to perform these several duties, and he has certain plans, purposes and designs to accomplish pertaining to us, pertaining to this nation, to other nations, and to the world in which we live,—pertaining to those who have lived and are now in another state of existence, and also pertaining to those who shall yet live.

The time in which we live is denominated in Scripture "the dispensation of the fulness of times," wherein it is said God will gather together all things in one, whether they be things in the earth or things in the heavens. This dispensation embraces all other dispensations, all principles and powers, rights, privileges, immunities and developments that have existed among men in the various ages that are past. This globe did not originate with man, nor was it constructed, designed or manipulated by him, nor were any of its organisms, sentient or insentient; for we are told that in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth and all that in them is; nor did this dispensation with which we are associated, nor have any of the dispensations associated with the works, plans or designs of the Almighty originated with man. After man had fallen, and it became necessary that he be driven from the garden, it needed the interposition of the Almighty, for as is said in the Book of Job it was necessary to "deliver his soul from the pit; I have found a ransom." That ransom was the Only Begotten Son of God who offered himself in the beginning to meet the demands of justice, to carry out the purposes of the Almighty, and to be a Savior and Redeemer to man. Adam was perfectly helpless in this respect, and it needed the direct interposition of the Almighty for the accomplishment of this object. In the patriarchal, or antediluvian age, when men were put in possession of any hope, any intelligence, any knowledge, or any revelation pertaining to God, these things did not originate with man, they came from the Lord and were given by inspiration; and when on account of the wickedness and corruption of mankind the old world had to be destroyed, a way was provided for a small remnant to be spared. By whom? By man? No. God dictated it. The Prophets prophesied about it. They taught the antediluvians as the people of this day are being taught, they warned them of the impending ruin that would overwhelm them, of the prison house to which they would go, and of the wrath and indignation of Heaven which would be poured out upon the peoples of the earth. It came to pass as they had declared. But God provided a way for the perpetuation of the human family. It was foretold to Methuselah that his seed should be preserved to perpetuate the human family upon the

earth, and it was so, Noah, who was one of his descendants, fulfilled that decree.

Again in later ages when the children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt they did not originate the method of their own deliverance, nor point out the way for its accomplishment. They were in a state of bondage and vassalage. God raised them up a Moses, revealed His will to him, set him apart for this mission, told him what to do, and after some little difficulties arising from human weaknesses were removed, Moses was accepted, and the Lord became his instructor, and pointed out in all instances the course that he should pursue, and in what manner the children of Israel were to be delivered, and He, the Holy One of Israel, gave them His law and ordinances and revealed unto them His will, and stood by and sustained, guided and directed them. This salvation did not come from the people, it did not originate with them, they owed it all to God the source of all truth, all light, all intelligence, all power and blessings. The time at length arrived that the Son of God was to come. Neither the Scribes and Pharisees, the High Priests and Sadducees, nor any of the sects and parties of the day comprehended the things that were about to transpire, and had nothing to do with bringing them to pass. His advent was announced to His mother by an angel, and His birth was heralded to shepherds by an angelic host, and the wise men of the East were led by His star to Bethlehem of Judea where they found the infant Savior, whom they recognized as the Messiah, and to whom they brought presents of gold, frankincense and myrrh; and whom they worshipped.

It is said in speaking of the Son of God that he did not come to do His own will, nor to carry out His own purposes, nor to fulfill any particular plan of His own, but He came to do the will of His Father who sent Him. Jesus in selecting His disciples took one man here and another there—a tax gatherer, a fisherman, and others who it was thought were the most unlikely of any men to carry out the purposes of God. He left the great men out of the question, that is the High Priests and the popular and pious of all classes, and he selected His own laborers to perform His own work; and He subsequently told them, you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and set you apart unto this mission. When a message had to be proclaimed to the world in these last days the agents were chosen on the same principle. There was any amount of teachers of divinity, any amount of professors of theology, any amount of reverend, and might reverend fathers and all classes of religious men and religious teachers; but God did not recognize them. He chose a young uneducated man and inspired him with the spirit of revelation, and placed upon him a mission and required him to perform it; and he was obedient to that requirement. I speak of this to show that we none of us had anything to do with the introduction of this work, but that, as in all other dispensations in the various ages of the world, God was the originator of everything that tended to develop a knowledge of Himself and of His plans and purposes; to unfold the past, to develop the present, and to make manifest the future.

To whom are we indebted for this book, called the Bible? We are told that holy men of old spake as they were moved upon by the Holy Ghost. And from whence did they receive that Holy Ghost? Not of man, nor by man, but by the revelations of God, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We sometimes feel to exalt ourselves a little in the position that we occupy pertaining to the Priesthood, pertaining to our organization, and pertaining to ordinances, etc. What have we to glory in? Nothing. None of us knew anything until it was revealed. None of us could comprehend any of these principles only as they have been made manifest. But by obedience to the Gospel we have received the Holy Ghost, and that Spirit takes of the things of God and shows them to us. We have received this and hence have been baptized into one baptism and all partaken of the self-same Spirit, as Paul expressed it, "dividing to every man severally as he will." The question arises, What is the object of this? It is that the world should be visited from time to time and communications made to the human family. Because light cleaves to light, truth

cleaves to truth, intelligence cleaves to intelligence; and as we are all made in the image of God, and as God is the God and Father of the spirits of all flesh, it is His right, it is His prerogative to communicate with the human family. We are told that there is a spirit in man and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth it understanding. God having made the earth, made the people to inhabit it, and made all things that exist therein, has a right to dictate, has a right to make known His will, has a right to communicate with whom He will and control matters as He sees proper: it belongs to Him by right; and He has seen proper in these last days to restore His Gospel to the earth, and, as I said before, intelligence cleaves to intelligence. We read in the Scriptures concerning man being a son of God. We read in the Scriptures about men becoming the adopted sons of God through obedience to the Gospel. Hence it is said: "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." By what means? Through the atonement of Jesus Christ and by the medium of the Gospel which has been introduced in different ages for that purpose. God having felt disposed to reveal the Gospel in these last days, has given the same principles and powers, the same light, revelation and intelligence that He did in former ages for the accomplishment of the same work and for the fulfillment of His purposes relating to the human family who are His children. Hence we occupy a very peculiar position in relation to God, in relation to the earth in which we live and the people thereof—in relation to both—to the living and to the dead.

It is proper for us to comprehend the position that we occupy. We sometimes arrive at curious conclusions pertaining to the wickedness of the world, and a variety of other things associated therewith. And permit me to say here, that we had no more to do with the peoples of the world, or the placing of them in the position they occupy, than we had in restoring the Gospel. We find ourselves a few people mixed up with the world. We find too that when the word of God is made manifest and the revelations of God are developed, that many things as they exist amongst mankind are out of order. There is a great amount of priestcraft, idolatry, corruption, oppression, tyranny, murder, bloodshed, covetousness, licentiousness and every kind of iniquity that can be conceived of; and that is more clearly made manifest to us because the Lord has been teaching us through the Prophets, and inspiring us with other feelings, and given unto us to comprehend things more clearly than others do. But what have we to do with the people of the world? We complain sometimes that they do not treat us exactly right. Well, they do not in all respects, and I do not think this is very difficult to understand. But there is nothing new about that. God has revealed unto us His law, and they do not comprehend it, neither do they want to; nor did the antediluvians. They were very wicked, very corrupt and very depraved, very immoral and very dishonest; but that was a matter between them and the Lord, and He dealt with them; and it is His business to deal with the nations of the earth at the present time and not ours further than we are directed by him. What is the mission that we have to perform to this nation? It is to preach the Gospel. That is one thing. That was the mission given to the disciples of Jesus in His day: Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned. This mission is being carried out in the fact of our sending representatives of this latter-day work to all the civilized nations that will receive our missionaries. But we are not placed here to control people; we are not placed here to use any improper influence over the minds or consciences of men. It is not for us to attempt to do what Mahomet did—to say that there was but one God, and Mahomet was His prophet, and by force compel all others to acknowledge it. To attempt to do that would be to attempt to interfere with the agency of man; and anything of that kind is altogether foreign to the character and spirit of our mission. We preach the Gospel to the people, and it is for them to receive or reject as they may choose.

We have done this to a great extent. Many of you Elders who are before and around me—and there are some thousands—have been engaged preaching this Gospel, but none of you ever used coercion, none of you ever attempted to force any man to obey the message that you had to declare. If you did, you did not understand your calling. And when you have been among the different nations preaching this Gospel, have you sought to interfere with their governments or with their laws, or endeavored to stir up commotion or rebellion or trouble of any kind? No. I am at the defiance of the world to prove any such statement. That does not belong to our faith. When the Elders are sent forth, they go as servants of God with a message from the Lord, to unfold the Scriptures and to bear testimony of the things that they themselves are witnesses of; and to administer the ordinances of the Gospel to all those who believe on their words. This is the position that we occupy in these matters. And what else do we do? We gather the people together; and they no sooner receive this Gospel than they are anxious to gather with the people of God. Why? Because the Scriptures say that they would? Because the Scriptures say, "gather my people, those that have made covenant with me by sacrifice." No, but because they have obeyed the Gospel and received the Holy Ghost, and that Holy Ghost has instructed them pertaining to these matters, as it instructed the prophets in former times that such an event would transpire. The people have gathered together, and you could not keep them back if you were to try to. They have been trying. You know that Mr. Evans wrote communications to the European ministers requesting them to use their influence by way of putting a stop to the "Mormon" emigration. It is rather a sorry comment upon the government of this nation, that boasts of its being "the land of the free, the home of the brave, and the asylum for the oppressed," and that a little over a hundred years ago the chief complaint against the nation from whence the colonists came, was the lack of religious toleration; to think that they should so far forget their original condition as to call upon what they term the effete monarchies of Europe to assist them in suppressing religious liberty and controlling human freedom. And when this subject was brought before Mr. Gladstone, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, a short time ago by some pragmatical zealot in the British Parliament calling his attention to the request of the American Secretary, he very distinctly told him that "he was unable to interfere with the operations of the Mormons in England, as he presumed their converts went with them willingly." Thus while the American government is trying to exert force and to interfere with religious matters and bind the consciences of men, the British government pleads for and guarantees to its subjects religious and social liberty. I am told that Mr. Evans is a great-grandson of Roger Sherman, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. I should not have thought that that gentleman would have so soon forgotten the position occupied by his ancestor. But it seems that such is the fact, nevertheless.

I repeat, our mission is to preach the Gospel, and then to gather the people that embrace it. And why? That there might be a nucleus formed, a people gathered who would be under the inspiration of the Almighty, and who would be willing to listen to the voice of God, a people who would receive and obey His word when it was made known to them. And this people in their gathered condition are called Zion, or the pure in heart. I wish we were pure in heart; that is, I wish we were more so than we are. And this is something that we all need to reflect upon, to consider the pit from whence we were dug, and the rock from whence we were hewn. I have heard people say, they were born in sin, and cradled in iniquity. It is probably very true. Many of us have been rocked in those cradles, and we have been nurtured amidst infamies, and we have been surrounded by and enveloped in evils of all kinds. We talk sometimes about Babylon—"Come out of her O my people, that ye partake not of her sins, nor receive of her plagues." We need not say too much about those people, for we came out from them ourselves; and it would not be becoming on our

part to speak badly about our former status. That reminds me of a conversation I had some years ago with some Protestants who were abusing the Catholics. I reminded them of the fact that they descended from them. They were calling the Catholic Church the mother of harlots. Well, said I, if that be true, she has brought forth a scourge offspring. History certainly informs us that the Protestants came from the Catholics, and therefore if the Catholic Church is the mother, they certainly must be the daughter and one would think there should be some affinity between them. It is not considered proper for people to rail against their mother.

It is well for us to comprehend our position with regard to the nation. Being gathered together, as a people, we have assumed a political status for we not only brought our religion and our spirits with us, but our bodies also; and by thus being gathered in this land we become naturally an integral part of the United States. We have received by the act of government of the United States territorial form of government, which we are authorized to perform certain functions of a political nature, and to enjoy, as do all the Territories, the free and full rights of American citizens therein; thus have become a part of the politics of these United States, and all the rights, privileges and immunities pertaining thereto, as exercised and enjoyed by all American citizens throughout this broad land, and these are guaranteed to us in the constitution of the United States and by Congress of the United States in an instrument denominated the Organic Act. And will this much for the United States with all her faults and infirmities do not believe there is a nation on the face of the earth to-day where we could have as much liberty as we enjoy here, and that is precisely what God knows. We are sometimes that we live under a bad government, and that the will of the people rules. It used to be, who rules now? Well, no man, we have got to make the best of it. We have a terrible form of government, with a governor appointed by the administration. I was going to say, God the mark. We have judges, other officers; and we have a national legislature that makes our laws, but those laws can be vetoed by man. There is a great deal of absolutism about it. But these are the circumstances in which we are placed; and I suppose it is better by a great many that we ought consider it a great privilege to be allowed to live. We do think so, we are not indebted to any officer for it; they did not give us our neither did this government. There are certain principles that are inherent in man, that belong to him and that were enunciated in ancient days, before the United States government was formed, and they are principles that rightfully belong to men everywhere. They are enshrined in the Declaration of Independence as inalienable rights, of which is that men have a right to live; another is that they have a right to pursue happiness; another is that they have a right to be free and no man has authority to deprive them of those God-given rights, and none but tyrants will do it. These principles I say, inalienable in man; they belong to him; they existed before any institutions were framed or any laws made. Men have in various ways striven to strip their fellow men these rights, and dispossess them of them. And hence the wars, bloodshed and carnage that is spread over the earth. We therefore are not indebted to the United States for these rights; we were as men born into the world, but the right to do as we please, to do as we please, as long as we do not transgress constitutional law, violate the rights of others.

Being organized, then, into a government such as it is—that is, the name of a government, the name of a legislature, the name of a people—being organized as we are, what next? We are necessarily obliged to look after our affairs, our political affairs. Our mission to the world is a mission of peace, the Gospel proclaims peace on earth and good will to men. Then, being organized in a governmental capacity, we have certain rights. They profess to give rights to us, but they don't. They deprive us of them while professing to impart them. I might enter a long line of argument here, but matter, I am merely speaking