

DISCOURSE BY PRESIDENT JOSEPH F. SMITH,

DELIVERED

At Ogden, Sunday Morning,
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REPORTED BY GEO. F. GIBBS.

THERE has, perhaps, never been a period in the history of the Church when the delusive spirits that are abroad in the world, deceiving the children of men, were more active than they are and have been for the last few years. I have never, in my recollection heard of so many pretended prophets and revelations, special messages, missions and manifestations to various individuals, as have come to my notice within the last few months or perhaps years. Some claim that they are in constant communication with angels, others that they have received a direct command from God to accomplish a certain mission, others claim to be Christ, and therefore assume the right to dictate and direct the labors of the Presidency and Twelve, and undertake to correct and set them right, and to show them wherein they lack inspiration, etc., and wherein it is necessary that a strong arm should be raised up in order to steady the ark of Zion. There has been a great deal of this kind of spirit manifested of late among men that are and have been in the Church for years; and not only such, but by men who never have been members and who have no knowledge of the character of this latter-day work. Messages from the spirit world, communications from the departed through mediums, people that permit themselves to be used for this purpose by lying and delusive spirits.

It has sometimes been sorrowful to see respected members of the Church, men who should know better, allow themselves to become the tools of seductive spirits. Such men seem, for the time at least, to lose sight of the fact that the Lord has established on earth the Priesthood in its fulness; and that by direct revelation and commandment from heaven; that He has instituted an order or government that is beyond the capacity, and that is superior to the wisdom and learning and understanding of man, so far, indeed, that it seems impossible for the human mind, unaided by the Spirit of God, to comprehend the beauties, powers, and character of the Holy Priesthood. It seems difficult for men to comprehend the workings of the Priesthood; its legitimate authority, its scope and power; and yet by the light of the spirit it is easily comprehended, but not understanding it men are easily deceived by seductive spirits that are abroad in the world. They are led to believe that something is wrong, and the next thing that transpires, they find themselves believing that they are chosen specially to set things right. It is very unfortunate for a man to be taken in this snare; for he is understood by the Latter-day Saints that as long as the servants of God are living pure lives, are honoring the Priesthood conferred upon them, and endeavoring to the best of their knowledge to magnify their offices and callings; to which they have been duly chosen by the voice of the people and the Priesthood, and sanctioned by the approval of God, so long as the Lord has any communication to make to the children of men, or any instructions to impart to His Church, He will make such communication through the legally appointed channel of the Priesthood; He will never go outside of it, as long, at least, as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints exists in its present form on the earth.

The Church of God has been organized, the Kingdom of God has been established, and the Gospel has been restored to the earth for the last time; and this work which has begun will never cease, but will continue to spread abroad, and increase in the earth, and gather to its fold the righteous, the honest, the pure, the meek and the poor of the earth, until "the kingdom" shall be exalted to power and glory in the midst of the world; and if will reign triumphantly when Babylon will be broken to pieces, and will fall to rise no more. These are the promises that have been made to us. This fact is indicated by the revelations of God to man through ancient and modern prophets, and through angels that have visited the earth in this dispensation of the fulness of times.

It is not my business nor that of any other individual to rise up as a revelator, as a prophet, as a seer, as an inspired man, to give revelation for the guidance of the Church, or to assume to dictate to the presiding authorities of the Church in any part of the world, much less in the midst of Zion, where the organizations of the Priesthood are about perfect, where everything is complete even to the organization of a branch. It is the right of individuals to be inspired and to receive manifestations of the Holy Spirit for their personal guidance, to strengthen their faith, and to encourage them in works of righteousness, in being faithful and observing and keeping the commandments which God has given unto them; it is the privilege of every man and woman to receive revelation to this end, but not further. The moment an individual rises up assuming the right to control and to dictate, or to sit in judgment on his brethren, especially upon those who preside, he should be promptly checked, or discord, division and confusion would be the result. Every man and woman in this Church should know better than to yield to such a spirit; the moment that such a feeling presents itself to them they should rebuke it, as it is in direct antagonism to the order of the Priesthood, and to the spirit and genius of this work. We can accept nothing as authoritative but that which comes directly through the appointed channel, the constituted organizations of the Priesthood, which is the channel that God has appointed through which to make known His mind and will to the world. It was necessary prior to the organization of this Church, that God should select from the inhabitants of the earth some person through whom to reveal His will to mankind; and it pleased Him to select for this purpose the youthful and untutored boy Joseph Smith, as David of old was His choice, but as there was no Priesthood on the earth when Joseph was called, legally constituted by the authority of heaven to officiate in the name of the Lord, it was necessary therefore that some one should be selected as the first Elder for the beginning of this work, for there had to be a beginning, and he was the one foreordained for the position which he occupied and filled. After calling and setting him apart for the work of introducing and establishing this Gospel of the Kingdom, the Lord of course recognized him as His mouthpiece, as His authorized agent, if you please, and it would be absolutely inconsistent, unreasonable and absurd to suppose that after God had called one man and appointed him to this work, that He should pass him by and go to somebody else to accomplish the same purpose. No sensible person would accept for one moment such a proposition. To seriously contemplate any such idea would be charging the Almighty with inconsistency, and with being the author of confusion, discord and scism. The Kingdom of God never could be established on earth in any such way.

Through Joseph then the Lord revealed himself to the world, and through him He chose the first Elders of the Church—men who were honest in their hearts; men whom He knew would receive the word and labor in connection with Joseph in this great and important undertaking; and all that have been ordained to the Priesthood, and all that have been appointed to any position whatever in this Church, have received their authority and commission through this channel, appointed of God, with Joseph at the head. This is the order, and it could not be otherwise. God will not raise up another prophet and another people to do the work that we have been appointed to do. He will never ignore those who have stood firm and true from the commencement, as it were, of this work, and who are still firm and faithful, inasmuch as they continue faithful to their trust. There is no question in my mind of their ever proving themselves unfaithful, as a body; for if any of them were to become unworthy in His sight, He would remove them out of their place and call others from the ranks to fill their positions. And thus His Priesthood will ever be found to be composed of the right men for the place, of men whose backs will be fitted for the burden, men through whom He can work and regulate the affairs of His Church according to the counsels of His own will. And the moment that individuals look to any other source, that moment they throw

themselves open to the seductive influences of Satan, and render themselves liable to become servants of the devil; they lose sight of the true order through which the blessings of the Priesthood are to be enjoyed; they step outside of the pale of the Kingdom of God, and are on dangerous ground. Whenever you see a man rise up claiming to have received direct revelation from the Lord to the Church, independent of the order and channel of the Priesthood, you may set him down as an impostor. God has not called you to go out to the world to be taught, or to receive revelations through apostates or strangers; but He has called and ordained you and sent you forth to teach and lead people in the paths of righteousness and salvation.

It is the duty, therefore, of every Latter-day Saint to seek for the spirit of truth, and to desire with full purpose of heart, and seek diligently for the gifts of wisdom and understanding that will lead and guide into all truth, that will enable us to comprehend the purposes of God, and this most perfect, most harmonious organization which God has instituted by His own wisdom in these last days for the gathering of Israel and for the communication of all His purposes as made known through His servants the Prophets. Men may become dissatisfied one with another, they may become dissatisfied towards the Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve, or others, and may say in their hearts, "I do not like such an one; I do not believe he is as good as he should be, he has too many faults and weaknesses and, therefore, I cannot and will not acknowledge his authority, as I have not faith in the man." Doubtless there are those, too many perhaps, who feel that way, but the trouble is, and that is the worst of it, just because they have become dissatisfied with the individual and harbored feelings of bitterness in their hearts against their brethren, they lose sight of the designs of the Almighty; they turn against the authority of the Holy Priesthood; and through their blindness allow themselves to be led astray, and at last turn away from the Church.

Now how should it be? I will tell you. In the first place every person should know that the Gospel is true, as this is every one's privilege who is baptized and receives the Holy Ghost. A man may be grieved in his feelings because of some personality between him and President Taylor, or Cannon or myself; he may have feelings in his heart which lead him to think that he could not sustain us in his faith and prayers; but if this should be the case, what is the course for him to pursue? He should say in his heart, "God has established His Kingdom, and His Priesthood is upon the earth; and notwithstanding my dislike for certain men, I know that the Gospel is true and that God is with His people; and that if I will do my duty and keep His commandments, the clouds will roll by and the mists will disappear, the spirit of the Lord will come more fully to my relief and by and by I will be able to see,—if I am in error, wherein I erred, and then I will repent of it, for I know that every wrong thing will yet be made right." I think all men should feel that way. A man may not have confidence in his Bishop or in one or both of his Counselors; circumstances might be such that according to his judgment the Bishop or his Counselors might be in the wrong, and his confidence in them, whether right or wrong, would therefore be destroyed; but because he may feel so, would it be right or consistent in him as an Elder in Israel, to set himself up as the judge of the Bishop or his Counselors and the whole Church? If one were to get in a position of this kind he would be like some others I have heard of, John and David Whitmer, for instance, two of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, and Wm. E. McClellan, and William Smith, two of the Twelve Apostles, some of whom are still living, and many others, both living and dead. Do you think you could convince those of this class that they had apostatized from the Church? No; these men are firmly convinced in their own minds that they never apostatized. They stoutly and indignantly deny that they ever apostatized or turned away from the Church, but say that Joseph Smith and the Twelve Apostles apostatized, and all the Church had apostatized and become very wicked, and that God has cut the Church off, but that Brother David Whitmer and Brother

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Smith and others are the only members of the Church in good standing, and they are all at variance with each other. If I were to raise my hand against my Bishop, against the Twelve or the First Presidency, because I did not like them, that moment I should place myself in the position that these men now occupy, and that scores of others who have passed away have occupied, and say: "The Church has apostatized, Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, and John Taylor, have apostatized, but I am firm in the faith; all the people have gone astray because they will not acknowledge me." There is where the man is who rebels against the authority of the Priesthood, and at the same time endeavors to hold on to the faith. Never is there but one appointed at a time to hold the keys of the kingdom of God pertaining to the earth. While Christ remained on the earth He held them; but when He departed He committed them to Peter, he being the President or Chief of the Apostles; and it was his right to direct and to receive revelation for the Church, and to give counsel to all the brethren. After Satan and wicked men had prevailed against the Church, crucified the Savior and killed the Apostles, the keys of the kingdom were taken from the earth. John the Revelator describes it most clearly. And from that time until Joseph Smith was called by the voice of the Almighty, and ordained to hold those keys, no man held them upon the earth that we know of. It is true the Lord did appoint other Twelve upon this continent, and His Church flourished and prospered in this land for many years; but the Lord declared that Peter, James and John, and the Twelve that walked with Him at Jerusalem held the Presidency over them. God may reveal himself to different nations, and establish among them the same Gospel and ordinances as He did anciently, if necessity require, but if these nations should be joined together there would be one head, and all the rest would be subordinate. So that from the time that the keys of this Priesthood were taken from the earth, until they were received by Joseph Smith, no man ever possessed that Priesthood, nor the keys thereof, with authority to build up the Zion of God and prepare a church or people for the second coming of Christ, "as a bride is adorned for the bridegroom;" unless it may have been among the lost tribes, yet of this we have no knowledge, but if so they would receive those keys necessary to administer in the ordinances of the Gospel for their salvation. We know not of their existence or the condition in which they are placed. The Gospel that is given to them is suited to their needs and condition, and is for their salvation, not ours, and yet it will be the same Gospel. And God will not call one from them to give to us the Priesthood, or to give to us keys and blessings, or to point out the organization of the Kingdom of God, because He has established that Priesthood here, and we have it. If He has any communication to make to us He will send His messengers to us. And in this way He will deliver His law and give His mind and will to the people. He will do it through the ordained channels of the Priesthood which He acknowledges and which He has established in the earth. He will go no where else to do it, neither will He send us to them unless they should be without the Priesthood and it becomes necessary to take the blessings of the Gospel to them, and I presume that will be the case.

When Joseph received the keys of the Priesthood he alone on the earth held them; that is, he was the first, he stood at the head. It was promised that he should not lose them or be removed out of his place, so long as he was faithful. And he was faithful. When he died President Young was chosen by the voice of the people, and sanctioned by the voice of God. He held the Priesthood which was after the order of the Son of God, with the keys which pertain to the presidency of that Priesthood upon earth. He received it from the hands of Joseph, directly from him or by his authority; and he held it until his death. When he died that mantle fell upon John Taylor, and while he lives he will hold that authority inasmuch as he is faithful. So it was with President Brigham Young, he held it on condition of his faithfulness. If any man in that position should become unfaithful, God would remove him out of

his place. I testify in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, that He will not suffer the head of the Church, him whom He has chosen to stand at the head, to transgress His laws and apostatize; the moment he should take a course that would in time lead to it, the God would take him away. Why? Because to suffer a wicked man to occupy that position, would be to allow, as it were, the fountain to become corrupted, which is something He will never permit. And why will he not suffer it? Because it is not the work of Joseph Smith, nor the work of Brigham Young, nor the work of John Taylor. It is for the work of man but of the Almighty; and it is His business to see that the men who occupy this position are men after His own heart, men that will receive His instructions from Him, and that they carry out the same according to the counsels of His will. You may wonder that He will see to it, and yet nothing upon this head. Had you will have no reason to find fault or to rise up in judgment against President Taylor or against President Young, or upon the prophet Joseph Smith, or upon the Twelve Apostles. We have no reason to rise up in judgment upon the President of the Stake, or upon the Bishop, or upon the Priesthood, any shape or form, unless we can so agreeably to the laws of the Church. If they decide against us inasmuch as God has conferred the keys of this Priesthood upon them, and the kingdom is here, and authority is here, and the Priesthood is here, and the organization of the kingdom of God is here—and much as the decision is reached, he rendered agreeably to the laws and commandments of God, then would be our bounden duty to be bly submit, and to bow to it and acknowledge it. You or I might think it hard, and possibly feel that it is unjust, but as it would be impossible to make it otherwise, we must submit. "What," says one, "is it to an unjust decision? No, President Taylor says it is unjust? You say it is; but twelve High Councilors and the Presidency of the Stake say it is just, and in holding to our idea of the unjustness of the decision, we put our judgment against that of fifteen disinterested men. Who then is to decide on the justice of the case? They, not me; and here is my business to acknowledge and yield to it. There is, however, a supervisory authority in the High Presidency; and they may exercising in some degree the pardoning power for unto them is given power to set the laws of God to forgive. "What," says another, "if they do not remit, they are committed unto them, and when God says ye retain, they are retained." President Taylor holds the keys of that authority in this Church, and may appeal then to the Presidency of the Church, and they may inquire into the justice or injustice of the decision and see if the case is entitled to a rehearing. But if the decision of the High Council is confirmed, then you have another appeal on earth. And the God has given to us the broadest latitude peacefully to defend our individual rights, agreeable to His and righteous laws. He permits us first to be tried by the Bishop and his Counselors; and even before that we have the opportunity to appeal our difficulties amicably to the going to a trial; or if we cannot settle it amicably among ourselves we are permitted to call in the Teacher to assist us if possible, to be reconciled to one another; and that cannot be done we can then bring the matter before the High Council to be formally tried. If we are in reason to believe the decision is unjust, we have the right to appeal our case to the High Council, and then, if the First Presidency decide, there may be a rehearing. So that the Lord has given us every possible chance to state our causes, and to stand in the Church, and if a man is asked to bow to an unjust decision, rendered by the Bishop's Council, or the High Council, is an unjust decision, is to say one of two things, namely, that these men, from three to fifteen of them, every one of whom should possess the spirit of the Lord, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and is quite as likely to understand such circumstances as the litigants, are all in error, or lack judgment, or that they are fully wicked and unjust, while the individual, and he a party to the decision, alone is right.

The moment a man says he will not submit to legally constituted authority of the Church, whether it is