

## LECTURE

## On "The Establishment and Abolishment of the Primitive Church."

The following lecture was recently delivered by Elder James A. Leishman, in the Logan Temple:

The subject now before us, being one of such vast importance to the human family, and especially to the Elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who are called in these days to preach the Gospel in its fullness, has induced me to undertake a task of no small proportions, that of tracing from the history of the past, the establishment of the Christian Church and its subsequent decadence and abolishment. I do not do this, however, without a full recognition of the fact that many of the Elders of the Church have written upon this subject, who have elucidated many events and incidents connected with it, and in this connection I do not wish nor hope to transcend the efforts that have been put forth; nor to eclipse the light that has been thrown upon this all-important subject. To an intelligent mind there is no subject of more

## VITAL INTEREST,

than this, nor around which cluster so many serious consequences to mankind, namely, that they should be in possession of a true, valid, and living religion.

When it is taken into account that man is a moral, intelligent and responsible being, and that his whole organism is adapted to and reaches after the supernatural and divine life, with eternal felicity; it is obvious that the method employed to attain these things, should be of such a character as will enable him to obtain them. It appears reasonable that an end so desirable as eternal felicity, should be predicated upon certain unalterable conditions, inasmuch as the desire of the human heart has been presumably the same in all ages. The physical, mental, spiritual, and intellectual capacities of the race are susceptible of the same impressions, the same advancement, the same progression and elevation towards the spiritual and divine life; notwithstanding the counter fact, that mankind have not made the same advancement in some periods that they have in others. This has not been due to their want of susceptibility in that direction, but rather to the perversity of their nature, based upon the free agency which is innate in all mankind. From these deductions it is evident that the one thing so greatly to be desired, namely,

## ETERNAL LIFE,

would be predicated upon the same conditions, which operate inexorably throughout the ages of mankind. That the attainment of the same blessing so devoutly wished for, can only be achieved by one invariable method, appears reasonable and consistent. From the best authority to be found, which is the sacred writings of holy and inspired men who have written and spoken in the different ages of the world, and whose words live and appear like living fire upon the pages of history, the truth of which is attested by their own weight, inform us that God created the heavens and the earth, and placed man upon it for specific purposes.

He was placed upon his own agency in the Garden of Eden, and put under a commandment not to eat of a certain tree in the garden. Upon the violation of that commandment certain results were to follow, among which was an alienation from the presence of God, until a perfect reparation could be made, sufficient to satisfy divine justice. Adam having become a fallen being, was unable to make amends for his transgression. It then became necessary that a Savior be furnished for him, who was competent to make a complete atonement for the law that he had transgressed. Jesus, the Only Begotten of the Father, was the person who took upon Himself the task. Hence in view of the

## PROMISE OF ATONEMENT

that was to be effected in the meridian of time, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, was the only plan of salvation given to mankind in the beginning. Many received it, believing in all good faith that the redemption of man would be wrought out by Jesus, as promised by the Father. Thus the law of God embraced in the Gospel, with its ordinances, gifts and blessings, based upon the atonement, in the then future, was as efficacious to the creature as it could possibly be after the fact of its accomplishment.

For various reasons that cannot be mentioned here, although sufficient of themselves, the Gospel was not permitted to remain among mankind continuously from Adam to Christ. Throughout the Mosaic dispensation which lasted nearly 1,500 years, the law given to the Israelites was in a large measure symbolical, carrying with it the typification of the atonement that was promised by the Father through Jesus Christ. The Jews had sadly departed from the spirit and genius of the Mosaic law in its collective sense, as well as in the essence thereof; for while it can be stated with truth, that the daily sacrifice was offered in token of the great sacrifice expected, the Jews had lost sight of the character of the Redeemer, as portrayed by all the prophets. They had also lost the power and spirit of their priesthood, so much so that when the Shiloh appeared among them they did not recognize Him as the Son of God,

nor the Redeemer of the world, but rejected Him and put him to death.

When the Savior appeared among men,

## A PECULIAR CONDITION

of the political and religious world existed, a knowledge of which, to some extent, is necessary, in order to comprehend the obstacles that stood in the way, and the difficulties that had to be encountered by the Savior in the introduction of the Gospel. The then political world, being under the jurisdiction of the Roman power, whose aggressive rule and conquest had par-taken so largely of that harsh element which so signalized it, that throughout its vast domain, the feeling of brotherhood was well nigh extinguished from society. The yoke that was imposed upon the necks of the conquered nations and kingdoms by the Romans, laid heavily upon them; a feeling of unrest permeated this vast empire; a prevailing desire more or less existed in the various provinces to throw off the chains that bound them. This condition of things required the continual surveillance of the Roman armies to keep the conquered in subordination. The political world at the advent of the Savior, although regarded as a peaceful period in comparison, so much so that the Temple of Janus in Rome, was closed, as an evidence that the Roman world was not at war with any people, was due more to the fact that there were no other nation of easy approach to make war upon. In no other province more than in the land of Palestine, did a feeling of uneasiness exist to extricate itself from the Roman power, which

## AGGRAVATED THE SITUATION

in which the Savior found Himself. So galling had been the fetters of the Jews imposed by that power, that in their feverish desire and hope for deliverance, they had reasoned themselves into the belief that when the Messiah came He would deliver them and place them in a position to which, as a people, they had long been accustomed, that of national independence. It is easily to be imagined how much the Jews were disappointed at the appearance of the Son of God, who came among them in a meek and lowly manner, so that thus at the very threshold of His work, He found an insuperable barrier to the hearts of His countrymen. The religious world, to say the least, was in no better condition. The Jews, who were the only people then known that professed a belief in the true God in Heaven, had lost the spirit and genius of the faith of their fathers, were living under a strained interpretation of the law, and were devoid of the vitality that signalized the administration of Moses and many others who succeeded him. In short they had apostatized from the real faith and doctrine of the Mosaic dispensation, and, as a people, were divided into conflicting sects of Judaism,

## WRANGLING AND CONTENTING

with each other over the signification and practice of the law. Such were the Hellenists, a portion of the Jews, that had adopted the Greek language and customs, which had been brought about in and after the captivity in Babylon; as also the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and others of the Jews, whose schismatic views regarding the law of Moses, founded a discordant and unpropitious feeling among that people.

Respecting the religious status of peoples cotemporary with the Jews, it will be safe to state that all were heathen or pagan, without any faith in Moses and the prophets, and were practising the various forms of their respective mythologies; and few were in a condition to comprehend and receive the sublime doctrine taught by Jesus. The pagan world was tossed to and fro with the erratic vagaries of its philosophers, and absurdities of the grossest kind were entertained respecting the genti that presided over the destinies of the multitudinous affairs of their superstitious life.

From the foregoing portrayal of the civil and religious world then existing, the outlook at the advent of the Savior, was anything but promising for a universal acceptance of the doctrines of Christianity. The Savior began His ministry when about 30 years of age, by quietly discussing the object of His mission, and gradually introducing among the Jews those sublime truths pertaining to the plan of redemption, that He was the Son of God, the promised Shiloh; thrusting upon their notice many sayings of the prophets in which they claimed to believe, which spoke of Him, and upon one occasion telling them to search the Scriptures, for in them they thought they had eternal life, and these were they that testified of Him.

## THE BENIGN PRECEPTS

which He inculcated, such as returning good for evil, to love their enemies, to pray for those who despitefully used them, when smitten on the one cheek to turn the other, if asked for their coat they were to give their cloak also; were regarded by a people who had been accustomed to exact an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, as intolerable; and that He was the Son of God was looked upon as blasphemy.

He continually encountered the criticisms of the learned and the Rabbi's among the Jews, who felt that the teachings of the Savior, if accepted, would supplant Judaism in all its forms, and work a revolution in the moral, civil and religious world. Christ openly denounced the hypocrisy of the Jews, and dissected with unerring precision the absurd notions entertained by them respecting the inadequacy of their system and the puer-

ility of their claim to the recognition of the Almighty.

John the Baptist, who was the herald and forerunner of Jesus, had previously announced the appearance of the Savior. John was an important factor in the introduction of Christianity, for it appears by the record that Christ was baptized by him, which event notably establishes the fact that Jesus practiced the doctrines He taught by subscribing to the same condition that He asked others to comply with, in order to be saved.

It may be stated in this connection, that the official career and ministry of the Savior began after the date of His baptism, and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit upon Him immediately afterwards; He slowly gathered around Him faithful followers, who believed in His Divinity and ministry, and eventually He chose

## TWELVE APOSTLES,

and organized His Church with every necessary functionary to carry on the work of evangelization upon the earth, and the unification of His disciples; carefully teaching the apostles and elders and other officers, the principles of the Gospel; viz: faith, repentance, baptism, and the laying on of the hands authoritatively for the gift of the Holy Ghost. He also taught them the certainty of a hereafter, eternal judgment, and the resurrection from the dead. In short He taught them the Gospel in its fullness, and that the doctrines which He had taught them would be accompanied by a power that would attest their truth and divinity. The vituperation with which Christ's doctrines were received by the masses, resulted in His crucifixion and burial. But on the third day He rose again, as He had declared He would.

The disaster that befel His followers may well be imagined when they put Him to death; and many doubtless felt that they had embraced a system that expired at the death of its founder. But not so; for Christ, after His resurrection, appeared to His immediate friends and His apostles, and revived and refreshed them, and re-affirmed all He had previously taught them. He tarried with them forty days during which He imparted precious information to them respecting the work to be undertaken after His departure. As is written of Him in Eph. 4th chap., 8-11: He had led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. To some He gave to be apostles, to some to be prophets, evangelists (seventies and elders), pastors, priests, teachers and deacons, for the work of the ministry, and that all might be brought to

## A UNITY OF THE FAITH.

Thus we have a happy elucidation of the organized Church of Christ as set up by Christ Himself, and when on the eve of His ascension, He commanded His apostles to go to all the world and preach His Gospel, the signs thereof would follow the believer, namely, the gift of tongues, the interpretation thereof, the gift of healing, etc.

In summarizing the Gospel of Christ we discover that it contained everything necessary to the salvation of the creature. What a sublime reflection, that in the midst of such perversity as existed previous to and during the apostolic age, God in His mercy to man, had planted upon the earth, His Church, the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, that all would seek after Him could find upon the earth, men that were authorized by Him to administer the ordinances of the Gospel, through which their sins would be forgiven; and they could be brought unto such relations with the Father, as assured them of their acceptance with Him.

The transformation brought about upon those who received the Gospel—the parity and piety of their lives afterwards contrasted so markedly with the wide-spread perversity everywhere around them—the influence and example of the Christian was a standing rebuke to the wicked and evil doer, which aroused the ire and displeasure of the unbeliever.

The preaching of the Gospel by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and the other parts of the world which they visited, was met with

## OPPOSITION AND HOSTILITY.

Indeed, the early saints were everywhere evil spoken of. Even after the preaching of the Gospel at Pentecost in Jerusalem, it may be said that the spirit of persecution against the saints began to assume a virulence that bore fruit in after time which marked that era as one of the bloodiest in the annals of time. The results of the labors of the apostles were the raising up of churches in Jerusalem, Alexandria, Ephesus, Antioch, Cesarea, Corinth, Thessaly, Rome, and many other places, in the organization of which were to be found the true exemplification of the Church of Christ, supervised by a living priesthood. A congregation of individuals, when taken together formed the Church of Christ, possessing a unique and particular organization as before noted, preaching and practising the principles of the Gospel, bearing the fruits of righteousness, accompanied with all the gifts and graces that ever adorned the Church of Christ upon the earth. It is therefore beyond a doubt, attested by the evidence of history, which remains uncontroverted, that Christianity was established by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The spread of Christianity in the primitive times through the instrumentality of the apostles and others, notwithstanding the antagonism it encountered,

## WAS SOMEWHAT ASTOUNDING,

when the nature of the times is con-

sidered, as may be inferred by the statement made in the 4th chapter of the fifth book of Tytler's Universal History, as follows: "A thorough acquaintance with the history of the world and the state of mankind at the time of our Savior's birth, has led the wisest and most enlightened inquirers to conclude that the Almighty having designed to illuminate the world by a revelation, there was no period at which it was more certainly required than that in which it was actually sent."

It will now be in order to trace the causes that eventually led to the dismemberment and final overthrow of the Church, left in the custody of the apostles, and especially Peter, the chief of that body, unto whom the Savior once addressed himself: "Peter, lovest thou me?" Peter answered "Yea Lord." "Then Feed my flock."

About the year 37, Stephen, the servant of God, following in the line of his duty, preached the Gospel in the streets of Jerusalem, and denounced the Jews that took part in the crucifixion of the Savior, as murderers, and set forth that Christ was the Redeemer and that though foully murdered upon the cross, rose from the dead, and had ascended to the Father. The enunciation of such doctrine so aroused the passions of the chief priests, the rulers and the Sanhedrim, that he was taken before them and tried for such infraction of the law as was construed to be found in his utterances, and was given over to the populace who

## STONED HIM TO DEATH.

The various sects then existing, although differing with each other in the tenets of their faith and practice, united in their denunciations against the doctrines of Christianity; and while the Greeks, Romans, and other nationalities embraced in the empire, were not believers in either Judaism, or Christianity, they nevertheless entertained ideas imbibed from the mythologies to which they belonged, that were in deadly opposition to the spirit and teachings of the Apostles. But there was one happy feature in the economy of the Roman government, that for a short period after the Ascension, served to check the growing antipathy against the early Saints. It was an established custom in that government, that in all the conquests that were made, the conquered were allowed to retain their peculiar form of worship, and to follow their customs and usages, both with respect to their religious and civil affairs, being ruled over by those appointed by the Roman senate.

This custom, to some extent, restrained the hostility that arose against the early Saints; but, as will be shown hereafter, even that toleration which existed in the government and among the various sects and schools ceased to exist, when it was found that the teachings of the Christians came directly in contact with the pernicious practices of Jew, Gentile and Pagan. It will be remembered that those who became proselytes to the Christian faith, formerly belonged to the various phases of Judaism and Paganism, as also some who belonged to the various schools of philosophy, the latter class of individuals answering to that class that are now termed atheists. It is evident that from such

## A HETEROGENEOUS SOURCE,

those who had become converted to the Gospel, were more or less imbued with the errors of those systems to which they were formerly attached, and it appears that many of such, after becoming members of the Church, in consequence of the opposition raised against them, and the darkness that prevailed, gave way to the current of error existing, and lost, to a great extent, the spirit of the Gospel, and lapsed into those views and errors, that they previously had given promise to abandon. And thus we read of those times, that heresies were introduced among the churches, requiring all the expostulation in the power of the apostles to counteract.

In consequence of the wide-spread departure, and the intolerance that suddenly sprung up against the Saints, the apostles spoke in prophetic language of the falling away that was portended in the introduction among the churches of false doctrines and pagan ideas. That they deplored the signs of the times many of them declared in unmistakable terms, as is recorded in 2 Thessa., 2 chap., 7th v. "For the mystery of the iniquity doth already work;" or in other words the premonitions of apostasy were becoming more and more apparent in many of the churches. When these things are taken into account in connection with the persecution that arose against the church, commencing with the infamous act of Nero,

## THE MONSTER IN HUMAN FORM,

having become stained with every vice and atrocity known to man, had arrived at a point of diabolism, which was superinduced by the animus that his foul deeds had aroused in the minds of the populace against him, and seizing upon a frenzy of prejudice, instigated by the resident Jews against the Christians, in and around Rome, he conceived the idea of setting the great city on fire, and at once spread the alarm that the Christians were the incendiaries. This foul strategy had the effect of distracting the attention of the people from Nero, which was turned with vindictive vengeance, against the innocent Christians, hundreds of whom were arrested upon this trumped up charge, and as fire was the alleged crime, fire was the punishment. The result was the burning of many souls whose tarred and pitched clothing,

prepared by the officials, lighted up the public gardens of Rome to the amusement of Nero, his courtiers, and the debased populace of Rome. This was the first of ten systematic persecutions inaugurated by this vile government, none of which will be made in their proper order as we proceed.

It is but natural to suppose that a persecution so violent as the one just mentioned, resulting in the martyrdoms of the Apostles Peter and Paul, which event occurred in the year 66, worked detrimentally to the cause of Christianity. Doubtless the Jews and Pagan philosophers were highly elated at the reverses the Roman government had brought upon the church, and encouraged by this misfortune, they became more embittered against the early Saints, and more tenacious of their own religious views. They assiduously misrepresented the Christians to the magistrates, and to the government of Rome,

## AS BEING DISLOYAL,

and attached to one Jesus whom Pilate had punished capitally. Such infamous insinuations gave rise to many cruelties, and the popular clamor incited the secular arm of the government in various parts of the empire, to punish and murder the early Saints, and harass and annoy them in various ways, with the hope to deplete their ranks.

The following will amplify the situation to which we refer, taken from the 5th chap. of Book one Mosheim's Ecc. History: "The Jews who lived out of Palestine, in the Roman provinces, did not yield to those of Jerusalem in point of cruelty to the innocent disciples of Christ. We learn from the Acts of the Apostles, and other records of unquestionable authority, that they spared the laborer, but zealously seized every occasion of animating the magistrate against the Christians, and instigating the multitude to demand their destruction."

"The High Priest of the nation, and the Jews who dwelt in Palestine, were instrumental in exciting the rage of the foreign Jews against the infant Church by sending messengers to exhort them to avoid all intercourse with the Christians. These perfidious accusations had the intended effect, and the rage of the Jews against the Christians was conveyed from father to son, from age to age; so that the Church of Christ had, in no period, more bitter and desperate enemies than the very people to whom the immortal Savior was more especially sent."

## THE ROMANS

who were troublesome to no nation on account of its religion, and who suffered even the Jews to live under their own laws and follow their own method of worship, treated the Christian alone with severity." \* \* \* "A principal reason of this severity \* \* \* seems to have been the abhorrence and contempt felt by the Christians for the religion of the empire, which was so intimately connected with the form, and indeed with the very essence of its political constitution; for, though the Romans gave an unlimited toleration to all religions which had nothing in their tenets dangerous to the commonwealth, yet they would not permit that of their ancestors, which was established by the law of the state, to be turned into derision, nor the people to be drawn away from their attachment to it." \* \* \* "They dared to ridicule the absurdities of the pagan superstition, and they were ardent and assiduous in gaining proselytes to the truth. Nor did they only attack the religion of Rome, but also all the different shapes and forms under which superstition appeared in the various countries in which they exercised their ministry."

"Another circumstance that irritated the Romans against the Christians was the simplicity of their worship, which resembled in nothing the sacred rites of any other people. They had no sacrifices, temples, images, oracles or sacerdotal orders; and this was sufficient to bring upon them the reproaches of an ignorant multitude, who imagined that there could be no religion without these. Thus they were looked upon as a sort of atheists; and, by the Roman law those who were

## CHARGEABLE WITH ATHEISM

were declared the pests of human society." \* \* \* "The various kinds of punishment, both capital and corrective, which were employed against the Christians are particularly described by learned men who have written professedly on that subject."

"These judicial forms were very different at different times, and changed, naturally, according to the mildness of the laws enacted by the different emperors against the Christians. Thus, at one time, we observe appearances of the most diligent search after the followers of Christ; at another, we find all persecution suspended, and positive accusation and information only allowed." (In other words, to be accused and arrested meant conviction without further formality of law, a striking similarity to the treatment of "Mormons" in Utah at the present time. Verily, history repeats itself.) "Under one reign we see them, on their being proved Christians, or their confessing themselves such, immediately dragged away to execution, unless they prevented punishment by apostasy; under another, we see inhuman magistrates endeavoring to compel them by all sorts of tortures, to renounce their religious profession." \* \* \* "Those who were of the lowest rank of the people, escaped the best; their obscurity in some measure, screened