

## DISCOURSE

By Elder ORSON PRATT, Delivered in the 14th Ward Assembly Rooms, Sunday Afternoon, Dec. 15, 1872.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

It would have been my choice this afternoon to sit and listen to others, but having been requested to address the congregation, I cheerfully comply, having a desire in my heart that God will pour out his Holy Spirit upon me and upon the hearers, so that we may be mutually edified. We call ourselves the children of the Most High God. It is a term that is Scriptural in its nature, and that has been applied to the people of God in all ages. In the hymn that was sung, at the opening of this meeting, this subject was more fully portrayed, according to the views of the Latter-day Saints, than is generally expressed by religious people in the world, for I believe that all religious people claim to be, and term themselves, the children of God. It may not be amiss to investigate, for a little while, the reality of this title, and see if we can come to some kind of an understanding in regard to our being the sons and daughters of the Most High God. It is said by some that we are his sons and daughters only by adoption, or through obedience to the gospel; that we become his sons and his daughters, through being born of the water and of the Spirit. Now I admit that it is necessary for the human family to be thus adopted; there would, however, have been no need of this adoption if mankind had never become wicked and corrupt. If there had never been any sin in the world, I do not think that adoption would have been necessary. According to my views, and I believe, according to the views of the Latter-day Saints, and also of the ancient Saints, we were at one period legitimately his sons and daughters independent of adoption, and this will carry us to the first ideas manifested by revelation, in regard to the origin of man. Many people suppose, when Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden, that then the first of the human family originated. I admit that that was the origin as far as man's temporal existence here on the earth is concerned; but had we no prior existence? Was that the beginning of man? Was it, in reality, his origin? This is a very important question, and a correct answer thereto would certainly be calculated to cheer the hearts of the children of men. That man had a secondary origin here on this earth, and was placed in the Garden of Eden, are Scriptural facts, which we all believe; but did not our first parents, and all their descendants have an existence, before there was any Garden of Eden on this earth? I think it is admitted by the whole Christian world, that man is a being compounded of body and spirit, at least all the Christian societies with which I am acquainted believe this. They all believe that within man's body or tabernacle of flesh and bones there dwells an immortal spirit. All Christian societies, with perhaps very few exceptions, believe that this human spirit, which dwells within the tabernacle, will exist after the dissolution of the body. There may be some few Christians who believe that the spirit is disorganized or dies between the time of death and the resurrection. I think this view is entertained by some few individuals, but the great mass of the human family believe that when this body falls asleep and crumbles back again to its mother earth, the spirit still survives as an organized being or personage. Some, however, do not believe that the spirit is a personage. They think it is something which can not be defined, something that has neither the shape nor the properties which we give to any kind of material substance. The views of the immaterialist are that the spirit occupies no space, and has no relation to matter, something entirely separate and distinct from matter. There are, however, but few in the Christian world who have worked themselves so far into the depths of these mysteries, as they term them, as to believe in such absurdities as these. I could not believe it for one moment, I never did. To suppose that there is a spirit in man and that that spirit has no shape, no likeness and occupies no space, as the immaterialists inform us in their writings, is something that I do not believe, nor ever have believed, and never could believe, unless I became perfectly beside myself, and deranged in my mind.

We, as Latter-day Saints, believe that the spirits that occupy these tabernacles have form and likeness similar to the human tabernacle. Of course there may be deformities existing in connection with the outward tabernacle which do not exist in connection with the spirit that inhabits it. These tabernacles become deformed by accident in various ways, sometimes at birth, but this may not altogether or in any degree deform the spirits that dwell within them, therefore we believe that the spirits which occupy the bodies of the human family are more or less in the resemblance of the tabernacles.

Now a question arises, If this spirit can exist separate and independent of the tabernacle, when the tabernacle dies is it unreasonable to suppose that it could exist before the tabernacle was formed? This is an important question, and in my estimation there is nothing absurd or unreasonable in the least degree, in believing

that that personage that we call the intelligent spirit, which can exist between death and the resurrection, separate and distinct from the body, could also have had an existence before the body was formed, that is, a pre-existence. This is a Scriptural doctrine, for there are many passages in Scripture which, in my estimation, prove that man had a pre-existence. If we turn to the first and second chapters of Genesis, we shall find it clearly indicated that man had an existence before he was placed in the Garden of Eden. In the first chapter of Genesis we are told that God made the earth, and the seas, and the grass and the herbs and the trees in about six days of time. We also read that on the fifth day of the creation he made the fish and fowls; that on the sixth day he made the animals, and last of all that he made man, male and female created he them. This seems to have been the last work of creation on the sixth day. Read on still further, in the second chapter of Genesis, and we are informed that on the seventh day there was not yet a man to till the ground. Now how are we going to reconcile this with that which is stated in the preceding chapter—on the fifth day he made the fowls and the fish, and on the sixth day he made the animals before he made man, and on the seventh day there was not yet a man to till the ground. And then we are informed about man's being placed in the garden on the seventh day; and also that on that day the beasts were formed and brought to the man to see what he would call them. This seems to have been another department of work that the Lord accomplished on the morning of the seventh day. He planted a garden on the seventh day in Eden, he placed the man in that garden on the seventh day; and then we are informed that he brought the beasts of the field and the various animals that he had made before the man, and man gave names to them on the Sabbath day; but on the sixth day they were made male and female. I reconcile this by giving a pre-existence to man; such is my faith. I believe that man had an existence before the Lord commenced the great temporal work of creation, so far as this planet is concerned. How long he had existed prior to the formation of this planet I do not know, but it is certain God seems to have formed the spiritual part of it in the six days, and when it comes to the temporal part that seems to have been the work of the seventh day. On the seventh day the Bible says that God ended his work. He did not altogether end it on the sixth, but he ended it on the seventh day.

When we come to new revelation which God has vouchsafed to give to his people in these latter times, this subject is made very plain; and on these new revelations in connection with the old, what little light we can gain through the hymn that was sung at the opening of the meeting, was founded, "When shall I regala thy presence," as expressed in the first verse, showing that we once were in his presence and existed where he is, but for some reason we have been banished therefrom, and that when we are redeemed we shall return again, or as one of the inspired writers has it—"the spirit shall return to God who gave it."

This returning of the spirit to God who gave it, clearly shows to my mind that the spirit once existed with God and dwelt in his presence, otherwise the word "return" would be inapplicable. If I were going to China it would be inapplicable for me to say I am returning to China. Why? Because I never have been there, consequently the word "return" would be an improper word. So in regard to the saying of the prophet—it would be entirely improper to say that, after the body crumbles to dust the spirit would "return" to God who gave it, if it never had been there.

Jesus seems to have been a pattern in all things pertaining to his brethren, and we find that he had a previous existence—his spirit existed before he came and tabernacled in the flesh. This is abundantly proved in the Scriptures. In the prayer which he offered to his heavenly Father beseeching him to make his disciples one, he says, "Father, glorify thou me with that glory which I had with thee before the world was." Now if Jesus dwelt with the Father before the world was, why not the rest of the family, or in other words, the rest of the spirits? It certainly was not his tabernacle which dwelt there before the world was, for he came in the meridian of time, and his spirit entered a tabernacle of flesh and bones, and was born of a woman just the same as all the rest of the human family. What then is the meaning of that Scripture which speaks of Jesus being the elder brother? It certainly could not have reference to him being the eldest so far as his natural birth on this earth was concerned, for he certainly was not the eldest, for generation after generation had preceded him during the four thousand years which had passed away, from the time of creation until he was born; but yet he is called the "elder brother." In another Scripture it is said of him that he was "the firstborn of every creature." This would imply, then, that Jesus, so far as the great family of man is concerned, was the first-born of the whole of them. How and when was he born? He was born in the eternal world, not his flesh and bones, but that intelligent spirit which dwelt within his tabernacle was born before this world was made, and he seems to have been the first spirit that was born, and for this

reason he became the elder brother; and we are told in many Scriptures in the New Testament, that we are his brethren, and that he is not ashamed to call us his brethren. I look upon him as having the same origin as we had, only he was the eldest; and if he was born in the eternal world thousands of years ago, why not all the rest of his brethren, so far as their spirits are concerned? I know that the objection will immediately arise in the minds of individuals who have not reflected on this subject, if we were intelligent personages thousands of years ago, and dwelling in the presence of God, and of Jesus, our elder brother, how is it that we have no remembrance of anything that transpired in our pre-existence? I answer this question by saying, that when we came into this world from our former state of existence, and had our spirits enclosed within these mortal tabernacles, it had a tendency to take away our memories so far as the past was concerned. It did so in relation to Jesus. He had great knowledge before he was born into this world—sufficient to create the heavens and the earth, hence we read in the Hebrews that God, by his Son, made the worlds. This was before Jesus came here, and he must then have been the possessor of great knowledge to have been able to do that; but when he took upon himself flesh and bones did he forget this knowledge? We read in the Scriptures, speaking of Jesus coming here and taking a body of flesh and bones, that "in his humiliation his judgment was taken away." What humiliation? His descending from the presence of God his Father and descending below all things, his judgment was taken away, that is, his remembrance of things that were past, and that knowledge which, while in the presence of his Father, enabled him to make worlds, and he had to begin at the first principles of knowledge, just the same as all his brethren who came here in the flesh. We read that Jesus, as he grew in stature, grew also in wisdom and knowledge. If he had possessed all wisdom, and had not forgotten that which he formerly possessed, how was it that he could increase in wisdom as he increased in stature? It shows clearly that the wisdom which he had possessed thousands of years before, had for a wise purpose been taken from him. "His judgment was taken away," and he left, as it were, in the very depth of humility, beginning at the very first principles of knowledge and growing up from grace to grace, as the Scriptures say, from one degree to another, until he received a fulness from his Father. Then when he did regain all his previous knowledge and wisdom, he had the fulness of the Father within him, in other words, "in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

Now if his knowledge was forgotten, and his judgment taken away, why not ours? We find this to be the case. What person among all the human family can comprehend what took place in his first existence? No one, it is blotted from the memory, and I think there is great wisdom manifested in withholding the knowledge of our previous existence. Why? Because we could not, if we had all our pre-existent knowledge, accompanying us into this world, show to our Father in the heavens and to the heavenly host that we would be in all things obedient; in other words we could not be tried as the Lord designs to try us here in this state of existence to qualify us for a higher state hereafter. In order to try the children of men, there must be a degree of knowledge withheld from them, for it would be no temptation to them if they could understand from the beginning the consequences of their acts, and the nature and results of this and that temptation. But in order that we may prove ourselves before the heavens, obedient and faithful in all things, we have to begin at the very first principles of knowledge, and be tried from knowledge to knowledge, and from grace to grace until, like our elder brother, we finally overcome and triumph over all our imperfections, and receive with him the same glory that he inherits, which glory he had before the world was.

This is the way that we as a people look upon our previous existence. There is something truly cheering in contemplating the previous existence of man, much more so than in the old idea of the sectarian world—that God is constantly creating, that he did not finish his work some five or six thousand years ago, but that he is creating all the time. They will tell you that they have spirits in their bodies capable of existing after the bodies have crumbled back to mother earth. Ask them the origin of these spirits, and they will tell you they originated about the time the infant tabernacles of flesh and bone originated. Hence, according to their ideas, God has all the time been creating about one person every twenty seconds, which I believe is about the average rate that persons are born into the world; in other words, about three a minute, and according to their ideas the Lord is engaged in making spirits with this rapidity, and sending them here to this world.

I cannot, for my part, see that there is any more absurdity in believing that he made them thousands of years before they came here, than to suppose that he made them just before they came here, and entered into the tabernacle. One can certainly not be more unreasonable than the other.

Because we can not recollect our former existence is no proof whatever that we did not have one. I can prove this. In regard to this present existence, what person is

there in this congregation who can remember the first six months of his or her infancy? There is not a man nor a woman on the face of the earth, I presume, who can remember this; but no person will argue, on that account, that he did not exist at that time. Oh no, says the objector, that would be an improper method of arguing. Our memories have nothing to do with a previous existence. If we remember it, all good; if we do not, it does not alter that existence.

If we were born in heaven before this world was made, the question might arise as to the nature of that birth. Was it by command that the spiritual substance, scattered through space, was miraculously brought together, and organized into a spiritual form, and called a spirit? Is that the way we were born? Is that the way that Jesus, the firstborn of every creature, was brought into existence? Oh no; we were all borne there after the same manner that we are here, that is to say, every person that had an existence before he came here had a literal father and a literal mother, a personal father and a personal mother; hence the Apostle Paul, in speaking to the heathen at Ephesus, says, "We are his offspring." Now I look upon every man and woman that have ever come here on this globe, or that ever will come, as having a father and mother in the heavens by whom their spirits were brought into existence. But how long they resided in the heavens before they came here is not revealed.

We will refer now to the 19th chapter of Job to show that there were sons of God before this world was made. The Lord asked Job a question in relation to his pre-existence, saying, "Where wast thou when I laid the corner stone of the earth?" Where were you, Job, when all the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, when the nucleus of this creation was commenced? If Job had been indoctrinated into all the mysteries of modern religionists he would have answered this question by saying, "Lord, why do you ask me such a question? I had no existence at that time." But the very question implies the existence of Job, but he had forgotten where he was, and the Lord put the question as though he did exist, showing to him in the declaration, that, when he laid the corner stone, of the earth there were a great many sons of God there, and that they all shouted together for joy. Who were these sons of God? They certainly were not the fleshly descendants of Adam, for he had not then been placed in the Garden of Eden. Who were they then? They were Jesus, the elder brother, and all the family that have come from that day until now—millions on millions—and all who will come hereafter, and take tabernacles of flesh and bones until the closing up scene of this creation. All these were present when God commenced this creation. Jesus was also there and superintended the work, for by him God made the worlds, consequently he must have been there, and all felt joyful, and shouted for joy. What produced their joy? It was foreknowledge. They knew that the creation then being formed was for their abiding place, where their spirits would go and take upon them tabernacles of flesh and bones, and they rejoiced at the prospect. They had more knowledge then than the world of mankind have now. They saw that it was absolutely necessary for their advancement in the scale of being to go and take tabernacles of flesh and bone; they saw that their spirits without tabernacles never could be made perfect, never could be placed in a position to attain to great power, dominion and glory like their Father; and understanding that the earth was being created to give them the opportunity of reaching his position, they sang together for joy. They composed a hymn, and if we could have a copy of it, we should no doubt find that it was a hymn in relation to the construction of the earth and its future habitation by those spirits in the form of men. I should like to see that hymn myself, and if we had it we would get our choir here to sing it. I think it would impart a good deal of information to us, and perhaps we would shout for joy again.

It is very evident that this was the belief of the people in the days of the Savior. Even the Apostles and those with Jesus evidently believed in the pre-existence of man. This is manifest from a certain question which they put to Jesus on the occasion of a blind man making his appearance before him. They said to him, "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" In other words, did this man sin before he was born, and in consequence of his sin was he born blind? Or was it that his father sinned that he was born blind? This question would have been very foolish to put to the Savior, unless they had believed in the pre-existence of man. But they not only did believe it, they also believed it possible for man to sin in that pre-existence, and that the penalty of that sin might be carried down to this state of existence, and be the cause of blindness at birth, and with that belief they put the question to the Savior. That would have been a very favorable opportunity for him to have corrected them, if their ideas about pre-existence had been false. He could have turned to them and said, he could not have sinned before he was born, and that be the cause that he was born blind, because he had no previous existence. But he said no such thing, he replied, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the glory of God might be made manifest."