

DISCOURSE

By Elder GEO. Q. CANNON, Delivered
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REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

THE subjects that have been touched upon by Elder Taylor are the most delightful that the human mind can contemplate. It is true that men can find employment and considerable enjoyment in the acquisition of wealth, and in expending the same in the busy scenes of life, but after all, there is something unsubstantial and unreal about everything of this character. Decay is written upon everything that is human, death is written upon everything that we put our hands to and upon ourselves. We know that we are here but for a short time; we know that everything we possess will, like ourselves, perish and pass away; that our existence here is an ephemeral one—shortlived, therefore when we can contemplate the future and the life that is to come, and can understand anything connected with it that we can rely upon, there is something in the contemplation that lifts us above everything of a sublunary or perishable character. We are brought nearer to God, we feel that there is a spark of immortality within us, that we are indeed immortal and partakers of the Divine nature, through our inheritance as the children of God. And this is the effect that the principles of the gospel, when properly understood, have upon mankind. They had this effect upon them in ancient days; they have this effect upon them in these days. It is on this account that men are capable of making sacrifices; and that men in ancient days could face every danger and could submit to the most ignominious tortures and death. It is knowledge concerning the future, which God has given to the Latter-day Saints, that has sustained them in their persecutions and trials in the past, and which sustains them at the present time; and it is this which has sustained thousands of other people who have not been Latter-day Saints, and who have not had a fulness of the gospel, but only understood the principles of the gospel to a partial extent. What is there that is calculated to fill the heart of man with greater joy than the knowledge that God has revealed the plan of salvation—a plan which not only comprehends within its scope man's individual salvation, but the salvation of his ancestors and his posterity, and gives unto him, to a certain extent, the power to be a savior of men, to be a progenitor in the earth, as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were; to be the means in the hands of God of bringing to pass also the salvation of those who have passed away in ignorance. It has been a matter which has puzzled thousands of well-meaning, honest people who believed in God and in the gospel as far as they knew it, to understand what disposition would be made of those who died in ignorance of the gospel. For instance, the millions of heathen who have died without having heard the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many men, including ministers, have entertained the idea that they go to a place of punishment from which there is no escape, but that they welter there in torment throughout the endless ages of eternity. Others, more charitable, have scarcely any idea what will become of them, and they therefore do not venture an opinion respecting the subject. Others still, have an idea that this can not be the fate of the heathen, or, if so, that God must be unjust. There is something revolting to the merciful mind in the idea that God, our Heavenly Father would condemn millions of people to endless pain because of their ignorance of some great principle or truth, which he might have communicated to them but did not. For instance, millions of people have lived in Polynesia and the islands of the Pacific for unnumbered generations—history does not tell us how many, their traditions scarcely number them—and they never heard, until quite recently, the name of Jesus Christ, never knew that he was the Son of God and the Savior of the world. They have died by millions in total ignorance of the plan of salvation as taught in the Scriptures. Millions died on this great continent before the landing of the whites on American soil—countless tribes of Indians wandered to and fro from the polar regions of the north to the equator, and from the equator to the polar regions of the south, and not one amongst them all knew anything about God, his Son Jesus Christ, or the plan of salvation. They lived and died, generation after generation, in ignorance of these important truths, and many of them were doubtless just and upright men, so far as their traditions enabled them to act and walk uprightly.

Certain religious denominations entertain the belief that these people have all been consigned to endless torment; and not only those who have inhabited this land, but those who have inhabited Polynesia and Australasia, the groups of Islands in the Indian Archipelago and throughout Asia and Africa. Who can contemplate such a plan of salvation, or rather condemnation, and admire the author of it, and worship him as a just, pure and holy being? Is there any wonder when such theories are propounded and advocated by the professed ministers of Jesus Christ,

the Prince of Peace, that men have revolted at such a belief and would not exercise faith in Jesus Christ? The wonder to me is that so many have received teachings from men who, professing to be ministers of Christ, have entertained such views as these. To think that God would consign to endless torment millions of his creatures who died in ignorance, of which they might have been relieved if he had revealed his will and sent his ministers unto them!

This is not the faith of the Latter-day Saints. The gospel that we have heard brings to us peace and joy. There is no feature in it from the contemplation of which we recoil. There is no feature connected with it that we can not sit down and contemplate with pleasure and joy, and the more we contemplate and investigate it, the higher our admiration rises for the author of it—the great and good Creator who has revealed it. So far as I understand this plan of salvation, which is the one taught by Christ and his apostles in ancient days and which is left on record in the Scriptures, there is nothing connected with it but what excites my admiration and calls forth my unbounded gratitude to God for having revealed it, and for having given me the privilege of understanding it, so far as I have learned it. Instead of a gospel filled with woe, sorrow and condemnation, it is a gospel of peace, joy and happiness to those who received it.

We as a people, brethren and sisters, and we should always bear this in mind, do not believe that God our Heavenly Father will condemn any human being unless he has been made acquainted with the law which he has revealed; in other words, to use the expression of one of the Apostles, "Where there is no law, there is no transgression." Unless a law is proclaimed unto men, that they may understand it, there can be no transgression of that law, and consequently no condemnation following its transgression; and if condemnation follow, there must be a knowledge of law. There must be a comprehension of a law and wilful violation of it before condemnation can come. There is no room for the exercise of pity to a person who, knowing a law, violates it. We do not have any feelings of pity to men who violate our laws when they understand them. We may regret their course, but when we know that they understood the law, and had power to live above it, and that through yielding to their weaknesses and to their propensities they have violated the law, we feel to say, "Let justice take its course, the punishment is a just one, and they must abide by it." So it is in the gospel—you will not be condemned for that which you do not understand, neither will any other people that ever lived, that now live, or ever will live in the future. They will be condemned according to their knowledge; every man will be judged according to the deeds done in the body. Then what shall be done with the millions who have died in ignorance? If I thought that the plan of God's salvation was confined to this earth, and this limited space of time, I should have different ideas of God to what I have. But God is eternal, and his salvation is an eternal plan of salvation. This earth, or the elements of which it is composed, is eternal. We who live on the earth are eternal in one sense—our spirits are eternal; and the elements of which our bodies or tabernacles are created are also eternal. They can be changed, dissolved and reconstructed, recreated and reorganized, but they are eternal, and so are we, and we shall live eternally. God's providences and God's salvation are not confined to this space of time, which we call life; but they extend throughout eternity, and when individuals die in ignorance of the gospel they will have the opportunity of hearing that gospel elsewhere. As has been said, "If the dead rise not at all, then why are ye baptized for the dead?" This was the remark of Paul. Peter also tells us that Jesus went to preach to the spirits in prison which sometime were disobedient when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. They had been in prison for nearly 2,500 years, according to our chronology; but Jesus, having the power to preach the gospel, went and preached to them while his body lay in the tomb. I know that this doctrine is strange to many persons. I recollect on one occasion preaching on the Sandwich Islands to a large congregation, endeavoring to prove that baptism for the remission of sins was necessary, and that, according to the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, unless a man was born of the water and of the Spirit he could in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven. After I had got through, a gentleman came forward from the congregation and commenced interrogating me on the statement which I had made; and in his remarks he dwelt particularly on the case of the thief on the cross. Said he, "You have told us that no man can enter the kingdom of heaven unless he is born of the water and of the Spirit." I told him that I had quoted the words of the Savior. He wished to know how I disposed of the repentant thief on the cross, who died at the same time that the Savior did. Said he, "You recollect that Jesus said, 'This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise;' but your doctrine conveys the idea that the thief did not and could not go to Paradise unless he was born of the water." I remarked to him that I supposed our views with regard to Paradise differed. He said

that he believed that Paradise was heaven—the presence of God, and that the thief went there immediately after death. I said to him, "The Scriptures tell us that he did not." The assertion startled him, and said he, "Do you mean to say that Jesus did not go to heaven?" I replied, "Jesus certainly did not go into the presence of his Father when he died, and to prove to you that what I say is correct, I have only to refer you to the 20th chapter of John, which contains the account of Mary and Jesus, after his resurrection. Mary went to the sepulchre on the morning of the Sabbath, and she found that the stone had been rolled away and that the Savior's body was gone. She was startled at the occurrence, and turning round she saw somebody standing beside her whom she supposed to be the gardener, and she inquired of him what had become of the body of her Lord. Instead of the gardener, it was Jesus, and he called her by name, and as soon as she heard her name she knew it was Jesus, and stepped forward to embrace him. But Jesus said, 'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father, but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God.' Now," said I, "here is the testimony of Jesus himself that, on the Sabbath after his crucifixion, during which time his body had lain in the tomb, he had not yet ascended to his Father." Said I, "Peter tells us that during this time, he had been to preach to the spirits in prison, who were disobedient in the days of Noah; and he also says, 'For for this cause was the gospel preached to them that are dead, that they might be judged by that gospel, just the same as they who are living.' From this we can learn how proper was the remark of Jesus to the thief. He did not say, 'Thou shalt be with me in my kingdom this day.' The thief said, 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.' But Jesus, who was then undergoing the pangs of death, and had not time to explain the plan of salvation to him, said, 'This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.' And he no doubt was with him, and heard him explain the gospel in its fulness, plainness and simplicity, and he had an opportunity of receiving or rejecting it.

These are the views entertained by the Latter-day Saints on this important subject. We believe that every being that ever has lived, that does live now or ever will live, will sooner or later be brought to a knowledge of the eternal plan of salvation, and that none will be condemned to endless torment only those who sin against the Holy Ghost; for Jesus says every sin shall be forgiven except the sin against the Holy Ghost; that shall not be forgiven in this world or the world to come. Every human being will be brought to a knowledge of the Redeemer's grace; every human being will have truth and error placed before him or her, and will have the opportunity of embracing truth and rejecting error. God has placed us here, we are his children, and he loves us all. We can not begin to understand the love that God our Father has for his children. He loves all that dwell on the face of the earth—the dark sons of Cain that dwell in Africa and in America, in Asia and throughout the islands of the sea, as well as those who live in Europe and America who are of the white race. All are the objects of his care. His providence is over all and his salvation is extended to all. But upon whom will condemnation rest? This is condemnation, says Jesus, that light has come into the world, and men are made to understand it and reject it. But will all be saved? Yes, every human being will be saved except those who omit the unpardonable sin. But will they all receive the same salvation? No; every man will be rewarded according to the deeds done in the body. Will those who live lives of ease and pleasure, consulting their own inclinations and gratifying them, be saved with those who endure all things for the truth's sake? We read in the Scriptures of men and women who aspired to serve God with all their mights, and to do everything that was required of them. They were they who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, who dwelt in dens and caves of the earth. They were willing to take upon them the obloquy and shame; to be sawn asunder, to have their heads cut off, to be crucified, to be thrown into the dens of wild beasts, and to suffer anything and everything, every kind of death, for the sake of the gospel that they had embraced, and they endured these things unflinchingly. Will they receive only the same glory as those who pass along without any affliction and suffering, and who have pleasure all their days? No, the apostle Paul, in the chapter that has been quoted from—15th chapter of the 1st of Corinthians, makes it plain that there is a difference in the degrees of glory that men will receive after death. He says that there is one glory of the sun, another of the moon and another of the stars. This shows that different degrees of glory will be awarded men and women in the resurrection according to their faithfulness here. Some will receive the glory of the sun, which is called the celestial glory; others will receive a glory typified by the moon, called the terrestrial glory; and others a glory typified by the stars, which is called the telestial glory.

The Latter-day Saints, as a people, are seeking to obtain celestial glory. They want to go where the Father and Son are, and to dwell eternally in their presence. They want to receive blessings similar to those which Jesus has received. On this account they have been as willing as the

former-day Saints to suffer all things for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

Many men wonder why we left the States as and when we did, and came into this wilderness, and why we endured persecutions. This is a matter of constant wonder to those who investigate our history and who do not understand the reasons which have prompted us to cling to our religion. They say, "If you will abandon this principle or that, we will fellowship you. If you reject the Book of Mormon, that is not much, you have the Bible. If you would reject Joseph Smith as a prophet, we would receive you. Your doctrine is not so unpalatable. If you did not have so much confidence in Brigham Young, and did not take him as your counselor in all things, there would not be anything particularly objectionable in your doctrines. You believe in the Bible, the Old and New Testaments; but there are some principles of your religion which you might as well abandon." Some men who call themselves good friends of the Latter-day Saints reason like this. They do not seem to understand that every principle connected with the gospel is vital to salvation, and that if we reject the Book of Mormon we reject the Bible; if we reject Joseph Smith, we reject Jesus Christ who inspired and sent him; if we reject Brigham Young as an apostle, we might as well reject Peter, James and John and the other apostles who lived in ancient days; and that, in fact, to reject any of these would be to reject the whole, and that to be Latter-day Saints we have to believe every principle connected with our religion, or we have to be complete apostates to the whole of it. We can not say we will receive this and reject that principle. We cannot say, We will receive faith in Jesus Christ, repentance of sin, baptism and the laying on of hands, and reject everything else. We will not gather with the people, we will not pay tithing, we will not believe in Brigham Young as an apostle or prophet. We can not be Latter-day Saints and feel thus, we must either receive, or be apostate to, the whole of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We are fighting for great truths, not with carnal weapons—swords, guns, or weapons of war; but we are engaged in a great and mighty spiritual contest, we are seeking to establish or rather to re-establish the principles of truth and righteousness on the earth. We are endeavoring to erect a standard of purity higher than that which now prevails and is recognized by men, and to elevate the people to that standard. That is the aim and labor of the Saints. We are misunderstood, so were Jesus and his apostles, and the prophets of God in ancient days. We stand in goodly company. We are arrayed, in this respect, with the noblest of earth's sons. Our names are cast out as evil, and everything we do is misrepresented and misunderstood, but this does not change our disposition or the character of the work we are engaged in. We are resolved, notwithstanding this, to stand firm to the principles which God has revealed unto us. This is the duty of every Latter-day Saint, come life or come death, or whatever may be the consequences. If God has entrusted us with the revelations of his will, if he has taught us holy and pure doctrines, as we testify that he has, we would be recreant to God and to the duties and obligations he has placed upon us if we did not stand up and face the world in arms, if necessary, to maintain his great truths in the earth.

It is so with everything connected with our religion. There is nothing impure about it—it is God's. There may be impurity in men, and they may fail in carrying out the doctrines which God has entrusted to them, but this does not alter the doctrines. They are true and good from beginning to end, from the first to the last that has been committed to us, and their practice among the people will exalt them.

"What?" says one, "will plural marriage, that we have been taught to look upon as so degrading, elevate people?" Yes, even that principle, much abused as it is, when it is understood by the people, will be viewed in a very different light from what it is now. And so with every other principle of the gospel. There is nothing that we teach or practice but what is contained in the Bible, and for which we do not have the example of prophets and apostles, and that was not embodied in the plan of salvation revealed to the ancients. We are willing to be tested by the word of God. Not by man's traditions and misconceptions; but we are willing to go to and be tested by that book upon which Christendom relies—the translation of the Scriptures made by King James the First, of England. If we have embraced error we are willing to renounce it whenever it is proved to us.

There are about a hundred and twenty-five thousand people in these valleys in Utah Territory. We are but a small handful of people, and we are surrounded by the foremost civilization of the age, which is believed in and upheld by forty millions of people, who have in their possession all the agencies of the pulpit and the press—the most advanced agencies of civilization; and our barbarism, as it is called, is brought face to face with their advanced civilization. We do not shrink from the contest, but are willing to abide the issue and to submit to the results. We are not afraid of this gospel. It is reported of President Yeung that he once said, It was a very poor religion that would not stand one railroad. I do not know whether he ever did make the remark, but whether