

DISCOURSE

By Elder GEORGE Q. CANNON,
Delivered in the New Tabernacle, Salt
Lake City, Sunday Afternoon,
July 14th, 1872.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

I WILL read a portion of the 3rd chapter of St. John:

There was man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

Thesame came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi. we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so^s is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?

In listening this morning to the remarks of Elder Schonfeldt on the everlasting gospel, as preached by the Elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he stated in substance, that none could receive salvation outside this church and outside the priesthood which God had restored to the church. He did not explain—had not time probably, or his mind was carried away on some other points, how, or why it is that salvation can only be obtained in the way that God, our heavenly Father, has prescribed. Many, doubtless, who listen to the elders of this church, when speaking upon the principles of life and salvation, have come to the conclusion, when they have not thoroughly understood the principles and the system as they are set forth, that we are an exceedingly exclusive and uncharitable people for believing that only a very few out of the large mass of human beings who have peopled the earth will be saved, while the great majority—those who are outside the pale of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—will go down to an endless hell.

The reason probably, that these ideas are entertained by many who have heard our elders preach, is because they have drawn deductions from the preaching they have heard, imagining that our views of the sayings of the Scriptures corresponded with theirs, and that it necessarily followed that all who failed to render obedience to the ordinances of the gospel, as we preach them, would go down to that endless hell in which so many of the sects believe. But any person entertaining such ideas does us, or rather the gospel that we preach, great injustice. We believe that God, our heavenly Father, is a God of perfect justice, a God of mercy, a God filled with longsuffering and tender compassion towards all the works of his hands. We could not, with our views respecting the character of God, believe as our friends imagine with regard to the destiny of those who die outside of this church, for that would be incompatible with and contrary to all that we understand concerning the character of our God—the God who is revealed in the Bible and the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We believe, as Jesus said, that "this is condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil." This is the condemnation under which mankind will suffer—the condemnation will follow the rejection of light by those to whom it may be sent in every nation and age of the world; in other words, we believe that where there is no law, there is no transgression—where men and women have not had the gospel, or the principles of salvation, communicated unto them, they cannot be held accountable for disobeying the same. It is a truth that has been enforced by all who have understood the gospel, that those to whom the gospel is revealed must obey it, or condemnation follows. Condemnation did not fall upon the inhabitants of the antediluvian world until Noah had taught unto them the will of God. Noah, commanded of God, went forth as a preacher of righteousness, de-

claring to the people the judgments that were about to come upon them; and God so inspired, directed and strengthened him that he was enabled to warn the people to such an extent that they were left without excuse, so much so that God felt justified in sending the flood upon the earth.

This has been the course the Almighty has pursued in every age when his judgments have been poured out upon the people—he has sent prophets to warn them and to tell them how they might escape the calamities threatened. This was so with the Jews, unto whom the Son of God came. He proclaimed the gospel unto them, and warned them of coming judgments, and he sent his disciples through all Jewry, doing the same. You all remember the Savior's pathetic lament over Jerusalem, when he said he would have gathered her people as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing, but they would not receive him as a messenger of salvation, as the heir and Son of God, empowered to impart unto them principles, obedience to which would have secured them life here and hereafter. He also pronounced a woe upon many cities of that land, and said that if the mighty works which had been done in them had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah, their people would have repented. But the Jews hardened their hearts, and not only rejected his testimony, but they shed his blood, and invoked condemnation on their own heads for doing so. History tells us that the judgments which Christ and his Apostles had declared did descend upon the Jewish nation. Jerusalem was taken, the temple thrown down, and the people carried into captivity, and the desolation and dreadful woes that had been predicted by the Son of God were all fulfilled upon that generation of Jews.

In these instances we see that God sent messengers to warn the people before his judgments were poured out upon them; and we also learn that when the gospel is proclaimed by those having authority, if the people reject it they are held to a strict accountability therefor, and condemnation inevitably follows—there is no escape from it, but it falls in all its severity upon those who reject the message of life and salvation when proclaimed by those having authority to proclaim it. A perusal of this book (the Bible) will convince all who believe in it, that it is a most dangerous thing, and attended with the most terrible consequences, to reject the message that God gives to his authorized servants to proclaim to their fellow-creatures. There is no instance of which we read, from the beginning of the book to the close thereof, where judgments did not fall upon a people if they did not repent of their sins and obey the message sent unto them by God. When I say repent, I mean a complete forsaking of sin, and turning from it truly and sincerely; in no other way can mankind escape the judgments and calamities threatened and of which they are warned.

In the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ there were certain conditions revealed. Mankind were required to obey a certain form of doctrine declared unto them; and when they did obey they received the blessings. But I have often thought when travelling abroad in the nation, how different it is in our day from what it was anciently. In our day we see countless numbers of elegant spires pointing to heaven, and legions of men preaching what they call the gospel, but the wickedness of the people is unchecked. Anciently, when God sent his authorized servants to proclaim his gospel to the people, salvation, on the one hand, followed obedience, or, on the other, condemnation followed rejection. And these effects did not linger, they were not deferred for centuries, but if the people did not repent after hearing the message of the servants of God great calamities quickly followed. They could not listen to the authorized servants of God for any length of time and harden their hearts against their testimony and warnings without speedy judgment following. This was the case from the days of Noah to the days of John the Revelator, and it will be the case in every generation when the gospel of the Son of God, in its purity and fullness, is proclaimed to the people, and when God has a church and priesthood upon the earth which he recognizes. He is the king of the earth, he is the Creator of all its inhabitants, and when he calls upon the people, and requires them to do anything, they must promptly comply, or suffer the terrible consequences of their disobedience.

In the gospel of Jesus Christ, as I have already remarked, there are certain conditions with which the people are expected to comply: if they do they receive the blessings, if they do not they receive condemnation. Jesus and his apostles taught that it was essential that mankind should believe in him as the Son of God—as the only name given under heaven by which men could be saved. All mankind were therefore required to believe and to have faith in him, and to approach the Father in his name. That was the first condition of the gospel as taught by Jesus and his Apostles.

The next condition was repentance. All who had committed sin and were guilty of wrong of any kind, were required to repent of that wrong and to live pure and holy lives. They were not only required to be sorry—to have compunctions of conscience for the commission of evil, but they were required to forsake it entirely and to become new creatures. If they had been dishonest, untruthful, unvirtuous,

profane; if they had taken advantage of their neighbor, borne false witness against him, or encroached upon his rights; if, in fact, they had done anything contrary to the dictates of the Holy Spirit, or of their consciences when enlightened by that Spirit, they were required to repent of and forsake the same.

The third condition of the gospel was, that parties who had believed in Jesus, and had repented of their sins, should take some step for the remission of them. Now the penalty of the sin that our father Adam committed was death—"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" was the proclamation of the Creator; and when Adam sinned he paid the penalty and died, and entailed death upon every generation of his posterity, and that sleep of death would have been eternal had it not been for the death of the Son of God. He came as the Redeemer of the world, he died for the sin that had been committed by Adam, he atoned for it, and thus ensured to all the family of man redemption from the grave or a resurrection of their mortal bodies. But he gave unto his disciples a commandment that they should preach remission of sins and that they should administer an ordinance by which all obedient believers could obtain remission of sins, and that ordinance was baptism. "Not the putting away," as the Apostle Paul says, "of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God." They were required to submit to this ordinance. Jesus taught it, and he, himself, although admittedly a pure being, set the example of obedience to it. When John was baptizing in the river Jordan Jesus went to him and requested baptism at his hand. John remonstrated with him, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" But Jesus said, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness," and he went down into the water and was baptized by John, and the first evidence that we have in the Scriptures of his recognition by the Father was on that occasion, for after he had been baptized the Holy Spirit descended upon him and a voice was heard, bearing testimony to the assembled multitude that Jesus was the beloved Son of the Father. He therefore set the example himself, so that it could not be said, though sinless, that he had not complied with the ordinance which he required all the inhabitants of the earth to submit to, and which the disciples administered to all repentant believers.

This prepared them for another ordinance which, we find in the Scriptures, was administered to all who had complied with the conditions of the gospel which I have named—namely, the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. I have been told repeatedly that this ordinance was to be administered only to those who were intended for the ministry, it was not designed for the members of the church called laymen. A careful perusal of the Scriptures, however, does not sustain this idea; but on the contrary it very clearly sustains the idea that this ordinance had to be administered to every one who joined the church, and that without it the Holy Ghost was not bestowed as a gift. To prove that this is correct you have only to read the 8th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, where you will find an account of the labors of Philip in the city of Samaria. It seems that Philip had power and authority to preach the gospel and to baptize men and women, but not to administer all the ordinances. I have the idea that he had the same authority as John the Baptist—the authority to baptize but not to confer the Holy Ghost. We find that when John was preaching he said that there would one come after him, whose shoes he was not worthy to bear, who would baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire. John baptized with water, but he did not confer any further gift or blessing—he had not the authority so to do. Philip seemed to have the same authority, for the sacred writer says that when the Apostles of Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the gospel at the hands of Philip, they sent unto them two Apostles, for as yet, although the Samaritans had been baptized with water, the Holy Ghost had not descended upon any of them; and we are told that when the Apostles came unto them they prayed with them and laid their hands upon them and they received the Holy Ghost. Nothing is said about the hands of the Apostles being laid upon those only who were intended for the ministry, but the ordinance was administered to all who had received baptism at the hands of Philip, without distinction of sex or station.

Another instance in support of this view we find in the 19th of the Acts. We read there that when Paul was passing through the upper coasts he came to Ephesus and he found there certain disciples who said they had been baptized unto John's baptism, but when he asked them if they had received the Holy Ghost they said they had not so much as heard of it. Then, we are informed, they were baptized in the name of the Lord, and when Paul, who had the necessary authority, had laid his hands upon them they received the Holy Ghost, and spake with tongues and prophesied. Many other proofs on this point might be adduced, but these are sufficient. From what has been said we learn that the first principle of the gospel is belief in Jesus Christ; the second principle is repentance of sin, and the third, baptism for the remission of sins.

"Ah!" says one, "Cannot I come to the

out of the cross and, through the atoning blood of Jesus, have my sins washed away without baptism?" I doubt not that hundreds, in various nations and generations, who have been in ignorance of the true gospel, and far removed from those who had authority to administer its ordinances, have had their sins blotted out. God has looked in mercy upon them, and on account of their sincerity has witnessed unto them that he accepted the broken spirits and contrite hearts which they offered unto him. I cannot doubt this; but wherever the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached in its fullness, none can obtain the remission of sins only in the way that God has pointed out, and that by baptism by one having the authority from God to administer that ordinance.

Supposing that I, with the views which I have of the gospel of Jesus Christ, were to-day outside of the church of God, and I were to say, "I will not be baptized for the remission of sins. My father or my grandfather was a good Methodist, or a good Presbyterian or Baptist, or a good sectarian of some other denomination, and he told me that he had experienced a change of heart, and I believe that he had his sins washed away through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, and on this account I will not submit to the ordinance of baptism which is preached to me as necessary to salvation, but I will seek for the remission of my sins the way my father or grandfather did," how do you think it would be with me? Should I obtain the remission of my sins at the hands of God? There would be no remission of sins for such an individual in this life. Light has come into the world, God has revealed to men the true principle by which remission of sins can be obtained, namely, baptism, and when that is taught to them and they refuse to obey it, condemnation follows, and the blessings will be withheld which were granted in days when, in ignorance, men taught the Lord in faith and humility and with broken and contrite spirits.

We now come to the fourth and last initiatory principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ—the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost. "Is it not possible," says one, "for a man to receive the Holy Ghost without being baptized for the remission of sins, and having hands laid upon him?" Says the reader of Scripture, "I recollect that Cornelius, the history whose conversion is contained in the 10th chapter of the Acts, received the Holy Ghost, and yet he was not baptized; and if did, is it not possible for others to do the same?" Let those who think so read the history very carefully, and they will find that in bestowing the Holy Ghost upon Cornelius without baptism, God had a purpose in view. Cornelius was the first Gentile unto whom the gospel was preached. The prevalent belief among the disciples, and one which they, being Jews, had inherited through the tradition of their fathers, was that the Gentiles were not to have the privilege of enjoying the blessings of the gospel, they were proposed to administer its ordinances to them. You recollect what Peter said when the Holy Ghost descended upon Cornelius, this uncircumcised man—and his house, whom they had supposed were without the pale of the gospel—"Who can forbid us seeing that they have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" Peter cited the bestowal of the Holy Ghost upon Cornelius and his house, as a proof that the ordinance of baptism should be administered to them, and to all believing repentant Gentiles as well as to the house of Israel. This, in connection with the vision which Peter had, you recollect it, wherein he saw a sheet let down from heaven, containing all manner of beasts, clean and unclean, he being commanded to arise, kill and thereof, had dispossessed his mind of prejudice which he had entertained common with his fellow believers, that gospel was for the Jews only. When he saw Cornelius and his house blessed, he inquired of his brethren why there was to prevent the ordinance of baptism being administered to them, and they were baptized by Peter.

Cornelius did not say, as many, doubtless would say to-day, "We have received the Holy Ghost, and having obtained this evidence of our acceptance with God, what is the use of our being baptized? Is it like that God would have given us the Holy Ghost if he had not forgiven our sins?" These inquiries, I think, would be made by hundreds in our day under such circumstances. But not so with Cornelius, he had heard the gospel preached to him by Peter, and though he had received the Holy Ghost, he believed it was still necessary for him to be baptized in water for the remission of his sins, and he complied with that ordinance, and then doubt not the hands of the servants of God were laid upon him to confirm him a member of the church and to seal upon him the blessing of the Holy Ghost, that he might be guided and guided by it into all truth.

This, my brethren and sisters, is the plan of salvation taught in the Scriptures. There is no other way given by which men can be saved. It is the will of God that Jesus trod, the way that the Apostles walked in, it is the doctrine which is taught, and when it is taught by those having authority from God to teach it, the Holy Ghost will follow the administration of these ordinances. The ancient gifts and blessings will be bestowed, and men will be led into all truth, the power of God will