

DISCOURSE

BY

PREST. GEORGE Q. CANNON,

DELIVERED

In the Assembly Hall, Salt Lake City,
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REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

I will read a portion of the 21st chapter of St Matthew, commencing at the 23rd verse. [The speaker read from the 23rd verse to the end of the chapter]. He then spoke as follows:—

A Latter-day Saint, or, as he is more popularly known, a "Mormon," reading the New Testament is deeply impressed with the similarity of the circumstances which surrounded Jesus and His disciples and those which have surrounded His people in these days. He is also struck, if he reads the Bible carefully—both the Old and the New Testament—with the similarity of the spirit with which the people of God in ancient days were treated and those who are His servants and His people in these days.

We live in a day and an age when it is very fashionable to throw doubts upon the Bible. It is almost looked upon as a mark of inferiority in thought and in progress to manifest entire belief in the Bible, or to accept it as it was accepted in former times before this unbelief became so prevalent. There are people who are called advanced thinkers in our age, who look upon themselves as having made such progress that they have left the Bible behind and think it a mark of superiority to express doubts concerning it and its teachings and its history. In fact it is not an unfrequent thing to hear men who call themselves ministers of Jesus Christ convey thoughts of this character to their congregations from the pulpit. I listened with extraordinary feelings last winter to one of this class, a professed minister of Jesus Christ, who seemed to have left the Bible entirely behind him, or to have laid it entirely aside, and to preach to the people the new philosophy of Darwin and others, so called advanced thinkers.

Now, there are ways left to us of proving for ourselves the truthfulness of Bible history, and especially of the doctrines that are taught in the Bible. God has not left His people without a testimony, or deprived them of the means of obtaining a knowledge for themselves concerning that which has taken place in the past. It is frequently asked by doubters—how are we to know concerning the truth of these things? Well, the Latter-day Saints have a very easy, simple method which, if adopted, will give entire satisfaction to every one who entertains doubts upon those subjects. For instance, let a man commence to investigate the principles of the Gospel as they are taught by the servants of God—I care not what his position may be, how good a reputation he may have, what his standing in society may be—if he will turn his attention to the investigation of the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as they are taught by His servants, he will suddenly awaken to the consciousness of the existence of a spirit in the world that is precisely like the spirit that was manifested in ancient days against Jesus and His apostles. He will be astonished, if he has had no experience in this matter, at the spirit of persecution and opposition in this direction, and how quickly his good name will be lost, and how quickly, also, he will be shunned and avoided by his late companions and associates and friends. I have had it frequently expressed to me as a matter of wonder that the Latter-day Saints should be so hated and that so much evil should be spoken concerning them, and people have been at a loss to understand why this should be. This has been especially the case where men and women have been acquainted with the Latter-day Saints and their lives and the doctrines they believe in. They, through this acquaintance, were satisfied that there was no real ground for the dislike, the hatred and the animosity that were manifested against the Latter-day Saints.

It has been incomprehensible to them that there should be such feelings entertained against a people of such lives and whose doctrines are so Scriptural and contain within themselves so many pure and holy truths—truths, which, if practiced by men and women, would bring them nearer to God. But this wonder has disappeared when these individuals have shown an inclination to espouse the principles of the Gospel as taught by this Church; for they have soon found to their entire satisfaction that the same animosity and feelings that existed in the breasts of those who are not of us was extended to them—the same spirit of hatred, the same feelings of dislike. This is a remarkable fact. You who are here to-day who belong to this Church, and who embraced its doctrines in lands where the Elders went to preach the Gospel, are witnesses in your own persons of the truth of that which I state. Before the Elders came to your region, or visited the town, or the village where you lived, you dwelt with your associates in the utmost harmony. There was nothing in your lives to disturb the peaceful relations which existed. You were one with them, and they were one with you. Your friends doubtless visited you and you visited

them on terms of perfect equality and of perfect friendship. When the Elders came and began preaching the principles of the Gospel, and you began to manifest an interest in the doctrines, you became aware that another feeling and another spirit had taken possession of your former relatives and friends, and that they looked askance at you. When you continued your researches and investigations you found that they shunned your society and began to say evil things about you and to break off the friendship that had formerly been so dear. This has been your experience, perhaps without exception. I am satisfied that if this congregation could be interrogated respecting the effects their espousal of the principles of the Gospel had upon their associates and upon the neighborhood where they dwelt, every one would state that which I now state, that their friends turned their backs against them, withdrew their fellowship from them, that their friends ceased to associate with them, that the good name they had in society was withdrawn from them, and that, for no other reason than the espousal of the truth, they lost, in many instances, their employment, and were threatened with other consequences of a most serious nature, if they should persist in their adherence to "Mormonism."

Now, this treatment which Latter-day Saints have received has been confined to them. Men and women may espouse other forms of religion and not experience such consequences as these. They might become Presbyterians, or Episcopalians, or Catholics, or join any of the numerous sects of the day without arousing any particular spirit of opposition. There might be prejudices in the minds of their friends against some forms of religion, but their prejudices would not take the form of active hostility and hatred against them because of their views or of their doctrines. But in so far as the doctrines of the Latter-day Saints are concerned there seems to be no disposition whatever to tolerate them, and the spirit aroused has not been satisfied with anything short of active hostility, in some instances of the most desperate character. Let one who has passed through this experience read the new Testament and the treatment which the people of God received in those days, and he will see how similar is the treatment extended unto him to that which the disciples of Jesus received when He was upon the earth. If any evidence were wanted by such a person of the truth of the Bible his own experience would furnish it to him.

The Latter-day Saints of all people upon the face of the earth have the strongest reasons for believing in the Old and New Testament. They have only to examine their own lives, they have only to be familiar with their own experience to be satisfied that no human being who had not been familiar with these things could have given such an account as we find recorded in the Bible of the treatment of the prophets and the servants of God.

This is one form of evidence that is furnished to us and that we have in our possession, and it is a form of evidence that can be seen by every observer. I have often thought that the world will be condemned because of the greatness of the evidences which God has given connected with this work—evidences which are accessible to all who will open their eyes to observe them. I do not speak now of the evidence which the believer receives; but I speak of those evidences that are perceptible to those who are not of our faith, to the world at large. I have often thought that if I did not know anything about this work, but were to travel through Salt Lake City and see a people attending to their own affairs, minding their own business, refraining from interfering with their neighbors, living at peace one with another, creating no disturbances, having no quarrels, at least, to speak of; and then hear all that is said about their wickedness, about their disregard of law, about their disloyalty, and about the danger there was in allowing them to remain as they are, it seems to me that I would be struck and deeply impressed by it. Here is a city comparatively free from drunkenness, not entirely, but still more free from drunkenness than cities generally are of its size that have the character of the population it has—with a turbulent class close to us; a city comparatively free from blasphemy; a city comparatively free from riots and from disturbances of the peace and violations of good order; if I could be a stranger here and should see these things, I would be compelled to investigate and learn what is the cause of all this hatred that exists. There would have to be something more than is alleged against them, it would seem to me to satisfy me and to put my mind to rest concerning them; because if I had traveled, I would know that in other cities a different condition of affairs exists. I would know that in New York, that in Washington itself, and that in all the leading cities of the United States crime of a hideous character, attended with more appalling consequences, is being practiced without incurring the least censure, it may be said, or calling forth any public condemnation from the Chief executive of the United States because of its existence, or arousing either Senators or members of the House to action to put these evils down. I say this would be the effect, it seems to me, upon my mind. I could not be satisfied with the assertion that this people were polygamists,

and therefore they were to be dreaded; that this people believed in a prophet, or in a priesthood, or some hierarchy that was dangerous to the country, and on that account should require special mention from the Executive of the nation, and special measures of the most terrible character to be framed by Senators and by members of the House of Congress. Of course men are differently constituted. That which would attract the attention of one does not have any effect upon another. But I often think the world will be condemned because these evidences which exist and which are open to every observer, respecting the character of the great work that God our Heavenly Father has established on the earth.

I am bold to say that if any other people but "Mormons" had done that which we have done in these mountains; if any other society upon the face of the continent had achieved such results as have been accomplished in these valleys since the advent of the Latter-day Saints here, there would have been no end of praise bestowed upon them because of their achievements and the importance of the labors they had performed. Instead of calling forth praise, that which we have done has seemed to incite only feelings of envy, fear and dread. The very fact that we live together in union and love is urged against us as a reason why we should be hated and why we should be dreaded. The very reason that we do not drink, that we do not commit whoredoms, that we do not abandon ourselves to the vices of the age, but seek to repress them and to bring them into subjection, and to teach our children to refrain from them; instead of being a matter of praise, is a cause of dislike and dread, and is urged against us as a reason why something should be done with us, some extra measure enacted against us.

Ought not this to strike thinking, reflecting, unprejudiced people, and cause them to examine into a system of this kind that has produced such effects as these? When a man reads the Bible, when he reads the history of Jesus and of the Apostles, what does he find? A being holy beyond all men—pure, undefiled, walking like a God in the midst of His generation, teaching men the purest, the loftiest, the most exalted principles of morality. This Jesus did. Words of life and wisdom and of salvation ever fell from His holy lips. One might think the generation would have recognized the beauty and the exceeding great value of the precepts that He taught; that they would have seen in His pure life something to admire, something to fall in love with. One would naturally think so. And then there were His disciples who followed in His footsteps, whose teachings were of the same character, leading men from sin to righteousness, pointing out the path to heaven, doing good wherever they went, bestowing blessings by their acts and their labors upon the people. One might naturally think, I say, that such men would be received by their generation as benefactors, as saviors in a certain sense. But what do we find? Why, as I have read to you from this record, the Pharisees wanted to kill Him because He taught pure doctrine and because He came in contact with their ideas, and they would have killed Him long before they did, but that they feared the people. They were hypocrites. They did not want the truth. They were entrenched in their own system, in their own forms of belief, and any man that interfered with them was in their estimation a public enemy that should be destroyed as soon as possible. Therefore they hated Jesus. Hated Him what for? Hated Him for the wrongs He did? No. Hated Him for the false doctrines that He taught? No. But they hated Him because He taught the truth. They could not endure the truth and were not willing to receive it, but would rather destroy the men or the man who would teach the truth, that did not fall in with them and work with them. What did they care how pure men might be who would believe in Jesus and practice His doctrines? They cared nothing about that. They talked about purity, but they did not want it. They talked about holiness, but it was offensive to them. The fruits that resulted from the teachings of Jesus and His disciples were fruits which they did not desire, although they were professed teachers of righteousness in the midst of the people. Why was this? It is easily explained by those who understand it. It is because they were filled with the spirit of their master the Devil. That is the reason. They did not want the spirit of God. They wanted the spirit of the evil one.

It might have been thought that in these days the whole religious world would have welcomed with joy and thanksgiving the testimony that was given by the Prophet of God; I mean the Prophet Joseph Smith. When he came he made an announcement. It was not an announcement that was contrary to announcements that had previously been made by the people of God, but was in consonance and in harmony therewith. The first testimony that Joseph Smith bore to the inhabitants of the earth in his boyhood was this: that God had revealed Himself to him, that he had seen Him and the Lord Jesus. Now, what was there in that testimony that men should have been afraid of? What was there in the testimony that God had shown himself to man once more that should have aroused hatred and opposition and a disposition to kill? It might be thought—that is, without experience in these

matters—that every Christian, every Bible believer, would have said in his heart,

"Thank God if this be true. I am afraid it is not true, but if it be true I thank God with all my heart that he has spoken once more from the heavens."

But what was the effect? Why, the effect was to make Christian teachers, so-called, angry. The effect was to arouse the deepest animosity and hatred. Men who professed to believe in Jesus and who wanted to have communication from Him according to their own statements, and who exhorted the people constantly to come to Jesus, when they heard of the announcement—the bare announcement—of this great truth, they grew angry in their hearts and felt as if they would like to shed the blood of this young man who bore this testimony. What an extraordinary manifestation of hatred! What was there in it, if it were not true, to disturb people, and if it were true why should not all the world have been glad of it? What was there about it to arouse these feelings? Why, the devil was mad. That is the truth of it, and those who had the spirit of the devil were as full of anger as he was, just as they were against Jesus. There was nothing in the life of Jesus, nothing in His teachings to excite animosity. On the contrary there was everything to foster love on the part of those who desired righteousness. But He was hated and His life was sought after. And so when this great truth was announced by the Prophet Joseph—that once more the heavens had been opened, once more God had condescended to speak to man and reveal His mind and His will unto him—that announcement excited the old animosity and hatred that had been so long dormant. The same spirit of anger and unbelief took possession of those who heard it. They were called Christians, too—Christian ministers. The ministers, in fact, were the most eager in seeking the destruction of Joseph. Like the Pharisees of old they could talk about God and about purity and everything of this character; but the moment that someone came in contact with them and with their creeds and with their ideas they were as full of bloodthirstiness and hatred as the Pharisees themselves were.

Joseph Smith afterwards made another announcement, which was that angels had come and ministered unto him, and that through their administration the old authority, that had been so long withdrawn from the earth—and through the withdrawal of which there had been so much confusion and division into sects and parties—that that old authority had once more been restored to the earth again. What was there about this to create the feelings that it did? What was there in the sentiment that men should fear. If it were not true, who would be hurt by it? Who would be injured by the statement if it was false? Some few might be. But why should the world be disturbed? Why should those who possessed the truth be agitated? Why should fear take possession of men entrenched in the holy principles that God has revealed? There was no reason for this fear, nor for any feelings such as were manifested. If it was true, why then, of course, every man should welcome it and be glad of it and not be afraid of it. This is a characteristic of all of truth and of those who espouse the truth. They are not afraid of anything that may be said as coming from God. They are willing that it should have a fair opportunity to be tested, to be investigated, and if there be no good about it to have that shown upon the surface. You will never find a people of God who have the truth persecuting another people. If they were to do so they would cease to be the people of God. It is the characteristic of the church of God always that it never condescends to persecution. It does not fear the announcement of any doctrine, or any principle, or any form of belief, or any so-called revelation. Strong in the knowledge that they have the truth and that God is with them, such a people can afford to let false doctrine when it manifests itself have the freedom of action, the right of agency which God has given to every human being and which every human being has a right to exercise undisturbed by his fellow man so long as he does not interfere with the happiness and the lives and the liberties of his fellow man.

But as I have said the bare announcement that God had spoken; the bare announcement that angels had come to the earth stirred up the whole religious world, it may be said, to a frenzy. Strange thing that so insignificant a person, naturally speaking, as this boy or man was, should have created such an excitement! But it was the case all around the neighborhood, all around the counties where he lived. The news spread concerning him, and the religious societies were in a ferment over him and over his statements, and it gradually grew and it has grown until to-day. The members of this church number in these mountains scarcely 200,000 people, men, women and children; and this handful of people, insignificant so far as numbers are concerned, disturbs the whole world, agitates Christendom from its centre to its circumference, and calls forth the thought, the highest thought of the leading minds of this nation from the Chief Executive down to the penny-aliner who writes in the humblest newspaper in the land. Is it not remarkable? Is it not wonderful? The very fact, as I have said, that we possess the virtues that under other circumstances men admire and which philan-

thropic men teach to their fellow man—the very fact that we possess these seem to form the chief cause of dislike and are often the basis of the charges that are made against us. Did Joseph Smith ever teach a doctrine that was not in strict accord with the principles that are contained in the holy book—that book which is counted the holiest of all books by all Christians? No man can put his finger upon a single principle, upon a single doctrine of this kind. I know that he has been accused, maliciously and falsely accused, of various acts. But here are the doctrines that he taught embodied in this volume [the Book of Doctrine and Covenants]; here are the revelations that he received from Almighty God through His son Jesus Christ. There is not a single word of unrighteousness in them tested by the highest standard of morality known to man. Here is a translation he made of the Book of Mormon. Examine it from the first chapter in Nephi to the last words of Ether or of Moroni, or any of the prophets, and there is not a single sentence, not a syllable that is not of the purest, the highest, and the most exalted morality, tested by the highest standards known to mankind. These books may undergo the most severe criticism and they will emerge from it as I have said pure and uncondemned by every human being who loves virtue, morality and truth.

These are the proofs of Joseph Smith's mission. If he taught doctrine that was not of God, or that was pure or that was unrighteous, where is the place to find it, within the books. But there is not one word that can be found of this character.

Joseph Smith endeavored to impress upon all men with whom he came in contact this great truth: that it was their privilege to aspire to a knowledge of God and a communication with His face to face, and that it was the privilege of every human being to see the Holy Ghost and the gifts that He has in full of these teachings. In fact it was the chief element in teaching from first to last, to lift the people up from their belief and ignorance and to lead them into close communion with Deity, asserting that he had seen Him that he talked with Him face to face, that he had beheld the Savior; that he had beheld holy angels, and that it was the privilege of all who would live it and exercise faith before God to have this knowledge for themselves. He did not say, "I am a prophet, I alone have this knowledge; it is served for me alone to enjoy its gifts." Not at all; but he said, "You can have the privilege as well as myself; it is your privilege as prophets as I am; to know God, know Him." He did not set himself up as a man to rule over the people to be a despot, or to be the means of conveying the mind and will of God to man. He never taught such doctrine as this; but when he went he taught the doctrines I described. He taught pure morality. He taught virtue. Read in this Book of Doctrine and Covenants what he says about it, "He that looketh upon women to lust after her, shall deny faith, and shall not have the spirit; if he repents not he shall be cast out. That is the doctrine of Joseph Smith—a pure morality and a high noble virtue. The adulterers, drunkards, the blasphemers, the fanatics, the bearers of false witness, all these characters he, in the revelations which God gave him, denounced and pronounced upon them the most severe character. He was always set like flint against the form of evil. What can be purer, can be more just, what can be more godlike than that which I have said? He that looketh upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, lose the Spirit of God; and much more is a man liable to lose the Spirit who not only does that, gives rein to his lust and actually commits the physical sin and transgresses the law of God by overstepping the bounds of virtue!"

Now, wherever he went these results that followed: the pure heart received his testimony with thankfulness, that God had once spoken from the heavens, and received a testimony for themselves concerning it. But as it was in the times so it is now; many have rejected the glad tidings of salvation. They have rejected the chief corner stone. Yet this work will go forward, but a small power to-day, but it will spread the earth, and will continue to spread and increase and gather the honest in heart, notwithstanding the efforts of those who fight against it. The Pharisees of this generation would, if they had the power, kill those who are engaged in it. They would have armies here. They would let loose the dogs of war among the people. For what? What have we done? Have we made these mountains any worse than they were when we came here? Are they any less desirable? What have we done to offend any? Do we interfere with any man's right? Do we interfere with a woman's right? Have we deprived any one of their agency, or of their liberty? Cannot every one in this land do right if they wish to do so? Cannot they worship God in any form they please without our meddling with them? Certainly they can. We have endeavored to put down drunkenness, blasphemy, whoredom, gambling and every form of vice, and our efforts are still in that direction and will be until