

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

PREST. JOHN TAYLOR,

In the 17th Ward Ward Meeting House, on Sunday afternoon, December 15th, 1878.

REPORTED BY GEO. F. GIBBS.

WE meet together from time to time to attend to the worship of the Almighty, because we think it is proper for us to pay due respect unto the Lord God, our heavenly Father; we assemble ourselves for the purpose of praying to him, of singing his praises, of speaking of principles, doctrines, ordinances and other matters in which we are individually and collectively interested, all of which is more or less connected with the worship of our God.

There is something associated with our religious views that differs materially from those of many others. The Lord has revealed unto us his will, or law; he has given unto us a knowledge of the principles of truth and righteousness; and he is seeking by the means he has appointed—the medium of the everlasting Gospel, to prepare us for the events that will necessarily take place in a short time, and to enable us to introduce among men those pure, holy and heavenly principles which exist with the Gods in the eternal worlds, and to prepare us, through the medium of the Gospel, to operate with him and with the holy priesthood that has existed in former ages, in the development of the purposes of God upon the earth. It is a great and important work in which we are engaged, and we need continually the direction and the guidance of the Almighty; for it stands to reason, when we reflect upon it, that no man, as is spoken of in the Scriptures, can know the things of God unless they are revealed to him by the Spirit of God. We talk of these things sometimes rather flippantly, and probably, in many instances, without due reflection. But when we look upon man as he is organized, and the limit and bounds of his intelligence, and then reflect upon the position that he sustains to the Almighty, we shall find that there is nothing very mysterious in these remarks, but that there is a great amount of truth and reason associated therewith. For instance, men know very little about themselves, or about the things of man or how to control their passions and habits and the various evils with which they are surrounded and have to combat. They know very little about the true condition of man and his relation to God, to the world, to the past, present, or future, as is evidenced by the position of the world everywhere wherever we turn our attention. We are beginning to find out some few things in relation to the laws of nature and the earth on which we dwell, but our knowledge of these things is very small comparatively, and yet we boast sometimes quite freely of our intelligence. But when we reflect on our true position, we know very little in reality even about the world in which we live, or about the properties of matter or the elements with which we are surrounded; and yet a few years ago the world knew much less than we know to-day. I can remember the time very well when there was no such thing as steam-boats. I remember sailing across the Atlantic more times than one when no such thing as a steam-boat was used for that purpose. I remember the time, too, when there were no such things as locomotives or railroads; and many of you know very well how it was in regard to the telegraph, the photograph, and a great many other things. They are simply certain principles that exist in the laws of nature that have been unveiled to us; but there are thousands of other things that we know very little about. And then what do we know about the future? What do we know about the heavens that are above us? We can get some scanty ideas and we boast very much of them, but really there is not very much to boast of when we reflect upon these things. These things are simple principles that we have become acquainted with through study and research by chemical analysis and the development of eternal laws. We are simply becoming acquainted with some of the principles that exist in nature. The question necessarily arises, who placed those principles here? Who organized this earth

on which we dwell and man upon it and all creation as it exists? Some superior intelligence, or power—we call it the power of God. "By faith we understand that the worlds were made by the power of God, so that things which are now seen were not made of things that do appear." There is not a particle of the human system but what is full of intelligence and displays forethought, prescience, design, skill and creative power; and everything bespeaks the handiwork of a wise, intelligent, omnipotent Creator, or God. When a little boy I used to ask myself, Who am I? Where did I come from? What am I doing here? And why am I here? etc. these things still puzzle us, at least many of them do, yet these are thoughts we cannot help reflecting upon. We see children born into the world, and we see spring and summer, autumn and winter follow each other in regular succession, and we ask ourselves, By what power were these things brought about? Why are we here and what is the object of all these things which we see around us? not to say anything about the worlds with which we are environed. For speaking of ourselves, we are only a speck in creation; there is nothing to or of us scarcely, or in the world we inhabit, in comparison to the myriads of worlds with which we are surrounded.

Now we frequently want to know the object of our existence and why we are here; and the Saints will still go a little further by asking, Why have we to battle with the affairs of this world, and to struggle, to be tried and tempted? And we go still further and ask, when we see our friends pass away from this state of existence one after another, and the body that was once full of life, animation and vitality now lying helpless and void of life, and our minds reach back into the years that are past and we think of the thousands of millions, yea, of myriads who have inhabited this earth and who have gone into another state of existence, and we are led to ask ourselves, Why is it thus? And we are led to ask ourselves further, Why are we thus situated? And why should we thus come into life, have an existence and then fade and decay? And it is proper that we should have such thoughts and such reflections. Who can unravel these things? Who can tell us upon natural principles the meaning of this strange phenomena, the whys and wherefores in relation to these matters? Nobody. We have peculiar feelings and sensations in common with all men in regard to the future. But what are the views, ideas and feelings of men generally in relation to these matters? And if they have views, what is the source of their intelligence? What scientist, philosopher, or divine can unravel to us many of these mysterious principles which we see every day exhibited before us? It is very difficult for man to comprehend, and nothing, as I said before, but the Spirit which organized the creations of God can reveal those principles and give us a knowledge of that fitness of things as they exist in the mind of the Creator, of our relationship to God and to each other and the world in which we exist and the worlds that are to come. Nothing but superhuman intelligence, even the inspiration of the Almighty, can reveal these things. We have ten thousand ideas, notions and feelings; the world is full of every kind of theory in relation to these matters. But what does it amount to? We may theorize as much as we please, but unless we receive some communication from the beings possessing intelligence superior to anything mortal, that are associated with these vast creations and know something of their origin and object, what can we know? We need communication with and revelation from God enlightening us thereon, or we shall still be in the dark and know nothing concerning the future and many things of the present and past. Some of our poets in rather beautiful metaphor point us to some place "beyond the bounds of time and space," where we are to look forward to a heavenly place, the Saint's secure abode. There is something very pleasing about such reflections, but at the same time there is something very foolish. I do not know how or upon what principle we are to get beyond the bounds of time and space; it is beyond my comprehension, and I very much question whether the person who wrote it could; in fact, I know he could not. We sing

sometimes, too, about "singing ourselves away to everlasting bliss." What is this and where is it? How shall we enjoy it and under what circumstances? Certainly those who talk about these things display no intelligence. We can never comprehend anything about these things but by the revelations of God either made directly to us or to us through others.

Now we Latter-day Saints are indebted—I was going to say to Joseph Smith, for what knowledge we have; but this would not be strictly true, for we are not indebted to him or any other man for the knowledge we possess; we are indebted to the Lord, and the Prophet Joseph was made use of by him as the medium to reveal, in the midst of the chaotic mass that existed in the world, the principles of life, light and intelligence and the laws by which the Gods are governed in the eternal worlds, to teach us what course we should pursue, that we might act wisely, prudently and intelligently, and comprehend the position we occupy here upon the earth, and the relationship that subsists between man and his Maker, and that we might understand things pertaining to the future as well as things pertaining to the present. And the religion we have had unfolded to us is to prepare us to take part in these things both in this world and the world to come; to teach us how to approach our Maker and to get further knowledge of his laws and the principles of truth that have been revealed to us. The world generally treat these things very lightly. The reason is they do not comprehend them, and therein lies the difficulty. And we only know them in part and see them in part and comprehend them in part; but without communion with the Almighty we certainly should not have understood anything at all about these things. There is something very peculiar in the world, and we as well as others are sometimes apt to be quite narrow and contracted in our ideas pertaining to the world in which we live and the people with whom we are surrounded. We are told that "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." And I would state further that all true intelligence which men possess in regard to the laws of nature and their operations, as well as any moral, scientific or philosophical ideas we may form that are correct proceed from the same source, whether acknowledged by men or not. And furthermore, whatever correct religious ideas that the world possess in relation to the future state, proceed from that portion of the Spirit that is given to every man to profit withal—not unto us only, but to every man, and to the influence of that Spirit all men are indebted for the degree of honor and integrity that exists among men. It is true there is very little comparatively, but for the amount there is they are indebted to God just as much as we are. The Apostle Paul, on a certain occasion, said that God had not left himself without witness. This is a general principle that exists everywhere and among all mankind. But there is another principle which is separate and distinct from that, and that is the principle that brings men into closer communion with the Almighty. And what is that? It is the Spirit of the Lord in a more eminent degree, and is called in the Scriptures the Holy Ghost. How do men obtain that? Through a certain medium that God has appointed, viz., by faith, repentance, baptism administered by proper authority, and laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. Now the Lord has had his "witness" upon the earth in different ages of time. When he has had this witness the Gospel has generally been associated therewith; it is a part and parcel of the great programme. There is a very foolish idea prevailing in the world, that there was no such thing as the Gospel until Jesus came. It is the greatest folly in creation. No Gospel until Jesus introduced it! Say you, "Do not the Scriptures say that life and immortality are brought about through the Gospel?" Yes. "And did not Jesus introduce the Gospel?" Yes. "Well, then, if he came and introduced the Gospel, why do you say that they had the Gospel before?" They always had the Gospel whenever men had a knowledge of God. It is the Gospel that brings life and immortality to light; it is the Gospel that places man in a position to obtain a just knowledge of God and of the eternities to come, of their position on the earth, and of their position as

it will be hereafter. It is that very principle brings, as we are told, life and immortality to light. And if you will trace out the records of either the Book of Mormon or the Bible, or those of any people that have lived upon the earth, and find anywhere a people that had a knowledge of life and immortality, then I will point you out a people that had the Gospel. It was through that principle that men before the flood had a knowledge of God and had communication with him. It was through that that Enoch understood the principles of heaven and applied those to his position, and it was by that power and through that principle that he, with the cities in which he lived, was translated, as well as the thousands who lived then and also after that time were translated; it was through the principle and power of the Gospel that brings life and immortality to light. It was through the same principle that Noah was saved; he had communication with God, who revealed to him what was coming on the earth and the results of it. God warned him and prepared him and told him what to do and how to do it, and he pursued the course given him, and he received his reward. It was through that principle that Abraham comprehended God and had revelation and communication with him, for without it he would have known nothing about God. But he understood, through the records of his fathers, of certain privileges that are mentioned in his history—certain privileges pertaining to himself and his progenitors, which he traced clear back to the days of Adam, by which he learned that he was an heir to the holy priesthood; and when he ascertained this he sought an ordination from the Lord. And when he was persecuted for his faith he left the land in which he lived, and he did so at the instance of the Lord: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." And the Lord greatly favored him and blessed him, and said unto him: "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Was that so? Yes, it has been fulfilled. Let us look at this for a moment and see whether it has or not. Who were Isaac and Jacob? Did they have communication with God? Yes. How did they obtain it? Through the medium of the Gospel and through the promises made to their father Abraham. And when Israel was in Egypt who delivered them? Moses. And who was Moses? A descendant of Abraham. Did he lead the people out of Egyptian bondage? Yes; God manifested his power in their behalf. Did Moses have the Gospel? Yes, and so did Abraham. The Apostle Paul says, in his epistle to the Galatians, "that God foreseeing that he would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed." The Israelites had the Gospel preached to them in the wilderness; but, as the Apostle says in speaking of them, "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." But Moses did lead some of them into the presence of God—those who were prepared to receive it; the others, when they heard the thunders and saw the lightning and heard the voice of God, they said unto Moses, "Speak thou unto us and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die;" we are not prepared for this glory, for this kind of manifestation which has been given unto us.

Well, they were foolish; they departed from correct principles, they violated the laws of God and therefore incurred his displeasure, and his Spirit was withdrawn from them, and the Gospel was taken from them and they were left under a law of carnal commandments, and the law was given them as a schoolmaster, we are told, until Christ came. And what did Christ do? He restored the fulness of the Gospel that they had forfeited, because of their former transgressions. What next? We go to the promise made to Abraham, which was that in him and in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. Moses, as I have said was of his seed, and he was the deliverer of the whole of that nation. And who were the prophets that existed among ancient Israel? They were descendants of Abraham; and to them came the word of God and the light of revelation. Who was Jesus? After the flesh of the seed of

Abraham. Who were his Twelve Apostles? Of the seed of Abraham. Who were the people that came to this continent—Lehi and his family about 600 years B. C.? Of the seed of Abraham. Who were the Apostles they had among them that spread forth among the millions that then lived upon this continent? Of the seed of Abraham. Who was Joseph Smith? Of the seed of Abraham; and he, we are told, was to be the son of Joseph and should himself be called Joseph. And he was raised up for what purpose? To injure or destroy mankind? No; but to bring and immortality to light through the Gospel. He, like other prominent men of God, came in the season of times to do the work which the Lord had appointed unto him, being called of God and taught of God; and being thus taught, possessed an intelligence second none on the earth. He introduced principles that no philosopher, scientist, or all the wisdom of the world combined was capable of developing; neither was it possible for anybody to bring to light such principles, unless through the revelations of God—principles of truth, principles of intelligence, principles which affect men in time and in eternity; principles which affect the world in which we live; principles which affect thousands and myriads that have lived before principles of salvation that extend to all nations and all peoples living or dead, pertaining to time and pertaining to eternity.

In what manner were these principles to be made known? How were men to get acquainted with these things? By being brought into communion with the Lord. And how was this to be done? Jesus, when upon the earth, ordained and set apart others and told them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. What Gospel? That Gospel that brings life and immortality to light; that Gospel that brings men into communion with their Maker; that Gospel that will show us who we are and who we are, and why we are here, as the object of our existence, as what lies before us. Jesus said his disciples in his day, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe: in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover. And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Was he with them? Yes. How did they preach? They called upon the people to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. What did? Men authorized of God and commissioned of him, and not somebody else. And what should they do for them? It should be the things of God and give them unto them; it should be life and immortality to light; it should place them in communion with the Lord; it should enable them to comprehend principles that no man could comprehend nor ever sought to comprehend, without the Spirit; it should bring their remembrance things that were past; it should lead them into truth, and it should show the things to come. Was it so? Did they have that Spirit? Yes. The spirit of prophecy? Yes. The spirit of revelation? Yes. They have the ministry of angels. Yes. Was the vision of all things open to their mind? Yes. They comprehended the manifestation of God until the winding up scene and until the dead small and great shall stand before God, and until this earth shall not only be deemed but become celestial and celestial beings inhabit it. They understood these things as prophesied and wrote about them. Is it so with our Gospel? Precisely the same. Have we had these things communicated to us? Yes. Have the Elders been called upon to go forth to the nations of the earth to call upon people to repent and be baptised as in former times? They have. Have most of you heard this Gospel preached among the different nations of the earth? You have. Have you received it? Have you obeyed it? Yes. Did you receive the Holy Ghost accompanying it? You did, and you know and can bear testimony of it. It is the self-same