

DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER JOHN NICHOLSON,

DELIVERED

In the Salt Lake Assembly Hall, Sunday Afternoon, March 16th, 1884.

REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

Who Christ Is—Pre-existence—The plan of Redemption—Election and Pre-destination—Man's Responsibility for his Acts—Effect of Divine Foreknowledge—The General Economy of God—The Gathering of the Jews—Coming of Christ—Comprehensiveness of the Gospel—The Finished Work of Christ—Necessity of God's Gifts to the Church—Degrees of Glory—Evidences of Power in the Gospel.

I HAVE been requested to address this congregation. I trust that in responding to the call I shall be blessed with a portion of the Holy Spirit, without which the preaching of the Elders is devoid of profit. To this end I hope to have the sympathy and faith of this large assemblage; and if I am tardy in concentrating my ideas on any particular point I hope that you will exercise patience and charity with regard to my position; for it is sometimes exceedingly difficult, unless a large portion of the Spirit rests down upon a speaker, to address a large congregation like this, to gather in the wanderings of the mind so as to concentrate it upon things that are profitable.

The last hymn that was sung was in reference to the greatest personage, with the exception of the Eternal Father, that ever visited the earth, and certainly the greatest that ever passed through a mortal probation in this sphere.

"Jesus, once of humble birth"

If we are asked the question who Jesus Christ is, we reply that He is the Son of God and the second person in the Godhead or the Trinity. This, however, is a bare fact. In this dispensation a flood of light has been let in regarding this great personage, and who He is, through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph, the revered founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one of His greatest Prophets—as assumed by the Latter-day Saints. There is a great deal in the revelations given through Joseph Smith in reference to the character of our Savior, showing who and what He is in detail, to a large extent. Among other things that have been revealed in this dispensation—revealed anew, because it was understood in other dispensations of God's revealed will to man prior to this one—is the fact that man had an existence in the spirit before taking upon himself mortality, that he lived as a spiritual entity, organized in its completeness, in the form of his mortality, or his mortal coil, as it is sometimes called. Through Joseph Smith has come to us the information regarding not only the source of our existence, but its object—why we have come here and why we suffer the ills that are incidental to a life on this planet or to the mortal state. This condition is one of trial and probation and was understood by us before we came here. It is stated, I believe in the 12th Chapter of the Revelations given through the Apostle called St. John, upon the Isle of Patmos, that there was war in heaven among the intelligences who dwell there, and that the dragon or the son of perdition rebelled against the authority of Him who sits upon the throne and is the Supreme Ruler, and in that rebellion drew with him a third part of the heavenly hosts, when the dragon or the son of perdition, with those who were his kindred spirits, were cast out of heaven and sent to the earth. Through Joseph Smith has come information as to some of the causes that led to that conflict, or the leading cause. This earth has been created as a dwelling place, first, temporal, and finally as an eternal dwelling place for those spirits of which God is the Father, for He, according to the Scriptures, is the Father of the spirits of all flesh. When the earth was completed for this specific purpose, as understood, the plan of redemption was formulated and decided upon by the Gods in eternity, by the intelligences that were there, and, according to the revelations, we were among those intelligences. There was one, as stated in the revelations through the Prophet, who looked like unto the Son of Man, who proposed to be the sacrifice, to be the Redeemer of the world and its inhabitants, and He proposed to the Father that He should send Him and to the Father be the honor and the glory. There was another—the son of the morning, Lucifer—who made a proposition to be sent also, and he stated to the Father, "Give me thy glory," and he proposed to save the human family, or save those spirits who are coming and tabernaculating upon this earth so that no one should be lost.

There is a principle exhibited in these two propositions. The first was to save man from his sins and to give the glory to the Father; the second was, to save mankind in their sins, or in other words, to deprive man of his free agency which is an eternal law established by our Heavenly Father in regard to all the intelligences which He has created. The proposition of the first was accepted and He was proclaimed the Redeemer of the world, hence He is called in the revelation given through John on the Isle of Pat-

mos, the Lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the world. He was slain from before the foundation of the world in theory; for it was before its foundations were laid, or at the time the scheme of salvation was formed and His proposition to come and satisfy the law by having his blood shed for His brethren, that took place.

In consequence of the rejection of the proposition of the other he rebelled against the authority of heaven, and was cast out of heaven together with those who went with him and sustained him in his rebellion, and they were cast down to the earth. And for what purpose? Having chosen evil in the agency which they held before the world was peopled, they were sent, seeing that that was their pursuit, upon the earth—those spirits who were deprived of the privilege of tabernaculating upon the earth because of their disobedience and rebellion—to tempt the sons and daughters of men, and that those who were willing rather to listen to those powers of darkness than the powers of light which God should also send them, should so exercise their agency in choosing the good or the evil as they might elect.

This, then, gives us an idea who this Jesus of lowly birth is, and the character of His mission which is to redeem the earth and its inhabitants all except those who shall be the sons of perdition, those who become a law to themselves and will not be governed by any law or any truth. These things have been revealed through the modern Prophet; and not only has this been revealed, but a great many stumbling blocks that have been in the pathway of people in regard to religion have been removed through the agency of the great Prophet of the 19th century, who established this work. There are many things which, when the mind is beclouded with error and there is no vision, cannot be understood; for, as the ancient Prophet has said, "Where no vision is the people perish"—that is, they perish for the Bread of Life, they perish for the word of the Lord.

For instance, much speculation is indulged in and there are various theories in the world, or the religious part of it, in reference to what is called election and predestination. Here is a key that opens up this principle to our gaze, when our minds are lit up with the spirit of inspiration. Jesus Christ was elected to be the Savior of the world, and on what principle was He elected? He was elected, so we are informed, because He loved righteousness and hated iniquity from the beginning, and was the first born of the Father. This, I say, opens up a key to this principle; for if He was elected on this ground for a specific purpose, so grand and glorious a purpose as the redemption of this earth and its people, then every other personage or intelligence called to any work of a conspicuous character on the earth is elected on the same ground and on the same principle—because of their righteousness and because of their adaptability to the work that is committed into their hands. Hence you will find in the Scripture, in the 1st chapter of Jeremiah, that Jesus Christ was not the only one that was elected in the courts of heaven to operate for the salvation of the human family, but we are told that God speaking through the Prophet I have just named informs him that before he was formed in the flesh at all and before He was brought forth into the world He was selected to be a Prophet, to be one of God's ministers, to have the authority to speak and to act in His name. And so it has been with all men who are selected. They are elected to this purpose because of their good works before they came here in the spirit world, because they were always valiant for the truth and loved righteousness and hated iniquity and possessed the requisite qualifications for the work that might be committed to them to accomplish. For there is an eternal law of adaptability or fitness that no doubt our Heavenly Father acts upon in His economy in regard to manipulating the affairs of His children upon the earth.

Regarding the agency of mankind in the spirit, before coming here, this appears to have been understood amongst the Jews in their day when they existed as a nationality, before they were scattered among the nations. As, for instance, this congregation will perhaps recollect the incident of Jesus Christ when He ministered in the flesh healing a man who was blind from his birth, and the Jews, who always sought to entrap the Savior by asking Him questions for the purpose of causing Him to commit Himself in some direction or other, asked Him this question regarding this blind man who was healed, "Who did this sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Now this pre-supposes the possibility of this man having been the cause of this misfortune by some act committed in the spirit, and also that there was an understanding that sin could be committed before men were born into the world. But the Savior dispossessed their minds of this idea in this particular instance and said, "Neither, but that God might be glorified." And God was glorified by the man being born blind, for upon him the Savior performed a miracle that was marvelous in the eyes of the people and was an indication of the divine character of His mission and the divine character of the power which He held, because He could say to the blind, those who were unable to see from their birth, "Receive thy sight," and they received their sight. And even on one occasion so great was the power of the Almighty

manifested through Jesus Christ that He raised the dead and caused Lazarus to come forth from his grave after his spirit had taken its flight from its earthly tabernacle.

So, also, in relation to predestination, which is a great mystery in the world, but which is simplified by the revelations given through the Prophet Joseph Smith. It is stated in the 8th Chapter of the Romans and the 29th verse "for whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren." Jesus Christ was predestined, elected to be the Savior of the world. He was elected to be like unto His Father, and to possess all things that His Father possesses, and to be clothed with the same glory. Jesus Christ being the first born among many brethren, there are others foreknown by God on the same principle that Christ was foreknown, predestined to the same glory, to the same exaltation, to the same bright destiny. Objections are sometimes brought up in regard to this theory of election and predestination, or that it was ordained that Jesus Christ should come in the meridian of time and have His blood shed for the sins of humanity. Sometimes it is brought up that it was prearranged and there was no help for it, then why is Judas condemned for the part that he took in bringing about His crucifixion? The explanation appears clear to me in this matter. Judas was not deprived of his agency. He was chosen as one of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. He possessed within his organization all the powers and qualifications of every other intelligent man that comes to the earth with the power of self-control, Jesus Christ was surrounded by other characters. He was surrounded by other eleven, for instance. Why did they not betray him? Why was it that they would not sell their Master and take His blood upon their hands? Simply because they used their agency for righteousness, while Judas, being a free agent also, took the other course and sold the Savior for a few pieces of silver, and no power on earth, nor any power anywhere, compelled him to perform that act. It was all his own free will, it was his free volition, and therefore he merited the condemnation which such an act brings because of his choosing it; it was a murder that he committed, and the consequence likewise fell upon the nation where Jesus was crucified. Why? Because no matter whether it was necessary that Jesus Christ's blood should be shed, it does not excuse the persons who will use their powers and their intelligence and their ability to accomplish the death of any being, be it the Savior or any other, only as it is done according to law, and consequently the results came down upon the Jewish nation, because they endorsed the death of Christ, they endorsed the murder of the Savior, and said His blood be upon us and upon our children; they suffered the consequences because they consented to the act. No matter how much good may be accomplished by an incident, or through even the commission of a crime; it does not alter the consequences of the deed in relation to the parties that perform it, because when they perform that act it is not for the purpose of doing good, but to deprive a being of life, and therefore having used their agency for this purpose they are under condemnation.

It has been said, also, that God knows all from the beginning to the end, and that he beholds, by his foreknowledge, the most detailed acts committed by his children, and the minutest thoughts that pass through their minds. This is a stumbling block in the way to some, and they think that this foreknowledge would destroy the agency of mankind. How would this destruction be brought about? Here is a congregation before me and around me who are here in probation. Suppose that an individual in this assemblage should have the power given him to understand your lives in every detail from the beginning to the end in regard to your course in this life, how much would that deprive you of your agency? Not a particle. The possession of that knowledge by any intelligence would not influence you at all. You would be just as free to act as you are now, and it should make no difference to the situation. It is evident that so far as the general design is concerned, all things are known to our Heavenly Father from the beginning to the end; and as President Young used frequently to preach, when men act contrary to the principle of righteousness and of truth, or whatever may be their acts in the premises, He controls and manipulates the results and so directs them in channels that will bring about those purposes that he had in view in the creation of this earth and placing His children upon it. Regarding this general design a flood of light is let in by the revelations through Joseph Smith, in what was called the School of the Prophets. In the early rise of the Church questions were asked of the prophet in regard to things of the kingdom of God, and he gave the answers for the instruction and edification of the interrogators. One question was asked in reference to a certain passage in the Revelations of Saint John to this effect: What is meant by the book which John saw sealed with seven seals upon it? You will find this matter in a revelation in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. The prophet replied that the book was the record that contained the history of the economy of God and His dealings in regard to the earth during

the seven thousand years of its temporal existence, and that each seal represented a thousand years, and that during that time the earth would exist in a temporary condition.

Then this is apparently the programme; and through the gospel revealed anew through Joseph—which is the gospel of faith in a risen and crucified redeemer, for the Latter-day Saints preach Christ and him crucified—we know his divine mission and the efficacy of his instruction; the gospel of repentance of sin by turning away from evil and living pure and holy lives; the gospel of baptism by immersion in water for the remission of sins; the gospel of the laying on of the hands of those having authority from Jesus Christ for the imparting of the Holy Ghost.

Through the medium of this gospel it has come to us as a message that we are upon the verge of the seventh book of the history of the earth, and that not long hence Jesus Christ will fulfill His promise and come and dwell on this earth or visit it and be in the midst of this people, who shall be looking for Him when he shall appear.

Great things, however, have to come to pass before the consummation of that great event, as we are informed through the Prophet Joseph Smith, One of these events is that the House of Israel, or the great bulk of them shall be gathered to their own land. They shall gather in upon the land of Palestine and build Jerusalem and establish themselves there as a Hebrew nationality again. The great bulk of the Hebrew race, even themselves, smile at such a proposition as this, yet the spirit of gathering to the land of their fathers is beginning to be manifested among that people. In the nations in Europe societies are being organized in various places whose express object is to take steps to secure the colonization of the ancient land of Abraham by his descendants. It belongs to Abraham and to his children as an everlasting inheritance. They will once more colonize that land, and those who are familiar with the signs of the times can scarcely fail to see the preparations they are making to that end. Great events are occurring in that land and around about it. More freedom is enjoyed in principalities of the East by the Jews than they have had for many centuries or ever since their dispersion after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and they are beginning to gather to the land of Palestine. It is a small beginning to be sure, but it is, out of small circumstances that mighty events develop, as according to the comparison so often used, from an acorn eventually evolves a great outspreading oak.

Another condition that seems to indicate the approach of that preparatory event is that the Jews are being persecuted in some of the countries or leading empires on the continent of Europe, notably Russia and Germany, and this is attended by the same unreasoning, hateful spirit towards that race. It does not appear that this spirit is diminishing much. I believe in acknowledging the hand of God in all things, and I believe the hand of God is in this and that it will ultimately come to pass that that race will find no rest for their feet until they are planted where God has designed that they should gather in this age, and prepare for the great events that have been predicted by all the holy Prophets since the world began—the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to take possession of His own by the right of creation, for He is the creator and the maker of this earth and it belongs to Him.

The grand principles revealed through Joseph Smith, the comprehensiveness of which is so great that we cannot in our finite condition grasp them, are beautiful to contemplate. The Latter-day Saints are accused by their enemies, or rather by those who misunderstand them—for those who have wrong ideas regarding them are not necessarily their enemies; they are judged, however, by those who have a misconception of their true character and the true character of the doctrines they preach and that they have embraced—of being narrow, contracted and exclusive in their views and practice. Such, however, is neither the case in theory or practice—in theory, certainly not. Religionists generally go forth with the proclamation that those who do not believe in Jesus Christ will not be saved by the plan of salvation. The narrowness of this conception may be considered when we observe that there are hundreds and millions of people who have never heard the name of Christ, who never listened to the sound of the voice of one of His servants who have proclaimed His Gospel. The very idea of even imagining that God our Heavenly Father would consign to condign punishment, to eternal wrath, people for not believing in something that they never heard, would be to impugn the justice of our Eternal Father.

It has been left to the Prophet Joseph Smith, whom I know to be a Prophet, to explain to the inhabitants of the earth the breadth and the beauty of the plan that was concocted in heaven for the benefit of the sons and daughters of God. He says that ultimately all mankind will be saved in some degree of glory or another except the sons of perdition. Who are the sons of perdition? They are those who commit the sin against the Holy Ghost. And how? In that they shed innocent blood, and who receive the power of God, who embrace this Gospel, who receive the power of the Priesthood and have tasted to some extent of the glory of the Father or of

the world to come, and then altogether turn away therefrom. For such there is no forgiveness in this world or in the world to come; they are lost forever, having committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, through whose medium alone can man be brought unto repentance, for as the Savior has said, "no man cometh unto me unless the Father draw him," and the Father draws the children of men by the power of the Holy Ghost. Having outraged every principle of truth and every principle of justice; having outraged and spurned every principle of equity, everything that is good and pure and holy and turned altogether therefrom, they have sacrificed the ministrations of that power and that spirit that can bring them back again into the presence of the Eternal God, and they are lost.

But all those who have not heard the Gospel, who have never learned of the name of Christ, who have never obeyed His doctrines at all in this life, will come within the broad folds of the Gospel of the Son of God, the Gospel of Him who was once of humble birth—they will be saved in some degree of glory or another; for God has created His children that they might ultimately have joy.

But there are many who teach the doctrines of that being that rebelled against the God of heaven. They are imbued with the spirit of Satan. And how is it indicated? It is indicated by this—that they seek to teach that kind of doctrine that would imply that man can be saved independent of his agency, or can be saved in his sins. Because Christ when He was upon the cross and crucified for the sins of humanity said, "It is finished." They talk about the finish of the work of Christ and assert that nothing that we can do will aid us in attaining to that glory that the faithful are destined to reach; that it all depends upon the merits of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; that it depends upon the merits of Jesus Christ in the abstract. But there remains something for us to do, and therefore those who proclaim to the world that all you have to do in order to obtain salvation in the Kingdom of God is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, independent of any works that might be accomplished by the believer—those who proclaim such a doctrine proclaim it falsely, and it is in keeping with the same spirit, the same influence that was in the bosom of Lucifer when he said that he would save all so that not one should be lost, and thus deprive the intelligences that God had created of that freedom and agency which in an eternal principle.

Christ did not in the crucifixion then finish His work, but He finished a portion of it—that is, He atoned for the sins of humanity. He shed His blood. And what did He do by the shedding of His blood? He simply opened up the door of salvation so that all who would might enter in. But He did not accomplish our salvation independent of our volition or our own works, and did not, so far as salvation is concerned, reduce mankind to the position of a mere machine; therefore he said Himself: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" And His own sayings are all contrary to such a fallacious and erroneous doctrine as that. He opened the door, but did not then finish His work, only one department of it; for after this event took place, which certain sectarians say was the complete work of Christ, He came down among His disciples in His resurrected body, which had been raised from the tomb, a body of flesh and bones, filled with spirit, but without blood in it, and He said: "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." And He ministered among them. How is it then that His work was finished? He told His disciples, furthermore, to tarry at the City of Jerusalem until they were endowed with power from on high. Why did He do this, if His saving work was finished? There was no necessity for it if the whole programme was completed. And so the Apostle says that Jesus Christ ascended up on high and gave gifts unto men. His work was not finished, for He gave gifts to men. Some of these gifts were in the nature of Apostles and Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers, and other officers inspired and authorized of God for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to a unity of the faith. These gifts were given because the whole work of Christ was in its meridian and not in its finished condition, and the work was to go forward from that time and the Church was to be blessed by the presence of those authorized officers of Christ.

Another fallacy preached everywhere is, that these gifts are done away with because they are no longer needed. What was the object of these gifts? For the perfecting of the Saints, or in other words, for the perfecting of the members of the Church of Christ. Then, are the members perfect? Is perfection attained, so that these mediums through which this condition was to be reached can be dispensed with? Not by any means. Then, they were for the work of the ministry; to take charge of that work and manipulate it for the benefit of the Church and of the human family generally, by spreading the Gospel far and wide that it might be preached to every kindred, tongue and people. Do not the members of the Church still require edification, or have we all progressed to that extent that we have come to a unity of the faith? The answer lies in the disrupted condition of the sects of the day; and if there was ever a time that