

DISCOURSE

BY

BISHOP ORSON F. WHITNEY,

DELIVERED

*In the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City,
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REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

IN rising before you this afternoon, my brethren and sisters, I place myself in the hands of the Lord, and I desire according to the strength He will give me, and the faith which may be exercised in my behalf, to present some thoughts before us, the reflection upon which may benefit us at this time.

We are as a people, passing through circumstances which are calculated to make those of sober minds meditative and thoughtful, and doubtless the question is being asked in the hearts of many Latter-day Saints, what will be the outcome of the situation in which we now find ourselves. There are perhaps some flutterings of the heart, some trembling of the hands, some faltering of the spirit, though I hope and believe that this feeling is not universal nor even general among those who are called Latter-day Saints. If we were not assured that we are in the performance of God's work, and that He has chosen us as instruments of His will, the means whereby He will accomplish that which He has set His hand to do, there might be some reason for some justification of the feeling to which I refer. But the Latter-day Saints are not engaged in their own work; they are not occupied in building up themselves. The stand they have taken has not been the result of their selfish desires, and is not the expression of their personal views, independent of a higher power. They have been selected from the world's people for the accomplishment of a mission which has as its object the blessing of the human family, and it is the consciousness of the rectitude of their intentions, of their desires to serve Him who has chosen them, and to administer to the happiness of their fellow creatures, that buoy them up to the performance of those duties in the discharge of which they are prepared to meet the scorn, the wrath and the opposition of the world.

It is no new thing for this people to be placed in such circumstances. It is only one more link in the chain of events, one incident among many which are sprinkled thickly through their history, from the time the Prophet Joseph was called of God and received revelations to organize upon the earth in this nineteenth century, the Church of Jesus Christ. It was revealed to him at the first visit of the angel Moroni to him, that he must expect the opposition of the world. He was told that his name should be had for good and evil throughout all nations, and especially for evil among the unconverted portions of the human race. So that he was prepared, at the very outset of his career, for the trials and tribulations through which he passed to the day when he was martyred for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. He prepared the minds and God prepared the minds of those who followed in his footsteps, those who received his testimony, who took up the cross to follow the Lord Jesus Christ through good and evil report, for the fate which has pursued them in fulfillment of prophecy, ancient and modern—that all who live godly lives in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Those who are unacquainted with this people, therefore, need not imagine that the circumstances in which we now are placed are a surprise. We have looked for it, and we look for more, until every jot and tittle of God's word shall be fulfilled, which He has sworn should be fulfilled though the heavens and the earth should pass away.

The Latter-day Saints look upon life as a season of trial, as a probation through which the souls of men may be purified; may receive that training and discipline which can only be acquired by passing through troublous experiences, that they may shine with lustre in the eyes of God, that they may be numbered among His jewels in the day when He will come to gather them and take them unto Himself. The Saints have always taken this stoical view of life. We do not regard it as a playground or holiday, but as a school in which we are engaged in securing an education that will prepare and fit us for the presence of our Father and God who placed us here. We are absent from our homes; we have left our Father and Mother in heaven; left the early associations of our existence behind us, self-exiled in obedience to the will of God, to pass through this mortal probation which He has ordained for man's purification and enlightenment. We do not believe that we have any time to idle away; that we are here to play truant, to chase the delusive phantoms of pleasure, to engage in folly or in wickedness, to dabble in those things which will lead us away from the object and purpose of our earthly existence; but that we should steadfastly devote our lives, our time, our talents, our opportunities, wherever and whatever they may be, to acquiring the great lessons which we came here to learn. We regard this life as but a drop in the ocean of eternal duration, and death simply as an incident, a passing from one sphere of existence to another.

I have referred to our eternal parentage and existence before we set foot

upon this world. This is a part of the eligion of the Saints—that they had a pre-existence in the presence of their Creator, that they stood as spirits, counterparts of the tabernacles in which they now are clothed, in the presence of God in the morning of His spiritual creation. For we are told that the works of God are firstly spiritual and then temporal, and on the earth firstly temporal and then spiritual. We believe the earth itself had a spiritual existence before it took upon itself the temporal body; that the spirits of men and women, the world over, were created in the spirit before they were created temporally; that the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, the fishes of the sea, and every form of animal and vegetable life were created in a similar manner; that all men passed through a certain trial or probation before they took their places here upon the earth, and proved, all who have been permitted to have an existence in mortality, their worthiness to stand here created in the image of God; being given the opportunity to pass through this condition, that by faithfulness and a display of integrity to God and to the principles of truth, they might rise to endless exaltation hereafter, return to the glorious state they left, attain to more than they left; for having descended, like their Savior, below all things, they would naturally rise above all things, according to the humility and faithfulness which they manifest here, to enjoy, eternally, the presence of God and the Lamb. The whole course of life is a time of trial; there will never come a time when man will not have his agency and the privilege of choosing for himself between good and evil. We read, and believe that there was a time of testing in our spiritual estate, when all men were required to give a proof of their worthiness to descend to this earth and take upon themselves mortality for a wise and glorious ultimate purpose.

When the earth was rolled into existence as a temporal body, or before it had a temporal body, there was a council held in heaven and the plan was discussed and considered whereby men might mount unto the exaltation to which we now aspire. There were two candidates put forward at that council for the office of Savior of the world. One presented Himself and said that He was willing to die that all men might live; to descend below all things; to endure the scorn, the wrath and the tribulation which He foresaw—and which they who were with Him foresaw—would be the fate of those who endeavored to stand by principle and to establish truth and righteousness on the earth. He said He was willing to die for the sake of establishing the truth, that whosoever should believe on Him and do the works that He commanded should not eternally perish, but should rise to life everlasting after their bodies had mouldered in the grave, and should be resurrected by the power of God. He said, furthermore, that He proposed to allow men their agency; the privilege of choosing between right and wrong; the privilege of acknowledging Him as their Savior, or the privilege of rejecting Him; the privilege of obeying His laws, which He would lay down for their guidance, or of rejecting and despising them, that they might receive the reward of their acts, whether they were good or whether they were evil. He did not offer to save man in his sins, but to save him from his sins. He proposed it should be an individual work; that man should not lie supinely upon his back while the work which gave him salvation was wrought out by another; that men should earn what they received, and receive that which they earned, not one jot or tittle more or less.

There was another candidate who seemed to believe that he had a superior plan; for he proposed to save all men, that not one soul should be lost. And how was he to accomplish this? By depriving man of his agency; by taking away that liberty of thought, that liberty of action, which is the inestimable privilege of freemen here upon the earth. He, in other words, would compel men to be saved; he would drive them into heaven; he would coerce them, thinking that quantity, irrespective of quality, was what was desired; and that if he saved all men his work would be more grand and comprehensive than that of the one who proposed to save man according to his merits. The plan of the second was rejected; for the wisdom of the Gods prevailed. They foresaw that it was not feasible; that it would be impossible to save man in his sins; that the presence of God being a pure presence, iniquity could not be sheltered there, could not be taken openly or surreptitiously into His Kingdom, for the glory of God would consume it as chaff in a furnace. It was foreseen that the plan which was advocated by Lucifer, Son of the Morning, a Son of God, who offered Himself as the Savior of the world, and who, it seems, ought to have had more wisdom; was impracticable. It was known that men could not be forced to be saved; that they could not receive that which they had not merited; that exaltation in the presence of God, meant the capacity to receive of His fullness; and that if man obtained a fullness, his fullness would be according to his capacity, or the size of his soul. They who were broader, more widely expanded, more grand in their natures by reason of the expanding process of obedience to the principles of righteousness, and by humility on earth, would receive a correspondingly larger degree and heavier weight of glory; while those who shirked their duties and responsibilities through fear of man, or personal

disinclination to endure the trials of this life, would receive simply what they earned, and not having developed their souls to the same extent could not obtain the same degree of glory; it would overpower them; they would be unable to stand up under it.

Consequently the plan of the first candidate was chosen, and He was ordained as the Savior of the world, to descend to this earth in the meridian of time, to establish the Gospel of salvation, to build up a Church which should be in constant and immediate communication with the heavens, whose officers should possess the Priesthood, should enjoy the powers of the Holy Ghost, and distribute them to those who would receive their testimony, and be willing to follow them. This created a controversy in the eternal world, and we are told that Lucifer, who was rejected from the candidacy of the Redeemership, rebelled against God. The condition which he made when he offered to be the Savior, was that God, his Father, should descend from His throne, and allow him to sit there in His stead; while the other, whom on earth we call Jesus Christ, said He would do all and give the glory to the Father to whom it belonged. These were the plans that were put forward, and the plan of the first one was accepted and established, and the other was rejected, because it was found to be infeasible, impracticable and wicked. But it seems there were a great many of our brethren and sisters—for they were our brethren and sisters in the spirit—who thought that the plan of Lucifer was glorious; for it would not make them personally accountable; they could do as they elected, take whatever course they pleased, and they would be saved whether they were worthy or unworthy. They sided with Lucifer; they raised the standard of rebellion; they sounded the tocsin of war, and the battle which ensued was between a third of the spiritual population of heaven who chose Lucifer as their leader, and the powers that remained true and steadfast, basing themselves upon principle, upon truth and righteousness, and being willing to stand or fall on the issue.

We are further taught that those who remained true to their Father in heaven, or who forebore to lift up their arms against Him, were given the privilege of descending to the earth and taking upon themselves mortal bodies. Wherever we find the human race, therefore, according to this teaching, they are children of God who were either valiant in fighting for Him at that day and winning the victory over those who rebelled against Him, or who at least refrained from joining the other side. There were, no doubt, as we are taught, degrees of faithfulness manifested. Some, perhaps, remained inactive through a feeling of fear, "sitting upon the fence," as we term it here, shaking hands with both sides, endeavoring to "carry water on both shoulders," being willing to join either side, whichever side was victorious, too fearful and cowardly to risk their personal interests upon the outcome of the conflict which was taken place. It is evident that the trial which we and all men passed through in that pre-existent life, was different in its nature to that which we are now passing through; for at that time we could behold the face of God; we were not shut out from His presence; we could feel His power, we could behold His glory; and the choice which we were then required to make was a choice of the eye, a choice of sight, a choice of apprehension comparatively full to what it is in this life. In other words, it did not require the same amount of faith which men must manifest in the flesh. It was the first estate which God had ordained for His creatures. Before He rolled this earth into existence He said, "We will make an earth wherein these may dwell, and we will prove them here-with, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; and they who keep their first estate shall be added upon, and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same Kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads forever and ever."

These were the conditions upon which we emerged from our spiritual life into life upon this planet, where we are in the dark, where the veil intervenes between us and the face of our Father, where we no longer see eye to eye, but are left to walk by faith and to develop within ourselves that germ of power which God has planted in the heart of every one of His creatures. It is folly to say that men have not faith. It is folly to say that everything that lives, moves and has a being does not possess it; for faith is the principle of action, the mainspring of life, and everything that lives exhibits it to a greater or less degree. The fish that swims in the sea exercises faith. The insect that creeps upon the earth exercises faith according to its capacity. We might also say that the vegetable world exhibits faith. The trees as they burst into blossom, as they bear fruit and fulfill the measure of their creation are exhibiting and developing that germ of action which is implanted within them by their Creator. And if this is true of the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, the fish of the sea, and the plants and the trees that grow upon the earth, it certainly must be true of all men; that they live, move, and have their being by reason of this great and wonderful principle of faith which they are required to exercise and develop. Even the infant must exercise it in learning to walk, from the arms of its mother to the arms of its father, taking one step after another, having confidence that it

can perform its little journey successfully. It is by faith that we learn to creep, to walk, to run, and it is by faith that we will yet soar into the eternities. Thus is its necessity as a principle of the Gospel, apparent, bearing upon its face the impress of its own divinity; for if we cannot creep or walk without the exercise of faith, how shall we be saved without it: how shall we mount from this life to eternal life, how shall we rise from this low condition of things to that which is higher and nobler? No wonder that "without faith it is impossible to please God." No wonder it should be the first, the primal principle of the Gospel which leads to everlasting life. We are required in this probation to purify ourselves from sin, by putting in practice the faith which is inherent within us; receiving and living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; having faith in His word, in the words of His Prophets, in the words of His servants whom He commissions from time to time and sends forth in the midst of the human family to administer for their salvation. And they who reject the messages of the Prophets; who put them to death; who throw them into prison; who pursue them with the terrors of unjust law for standing true to their convictions, are closing upon themselves the gates of eternal life. They are writing their own epitaphs; they are digging their own graves. God will require of you and me an explanation of the uses to which we put the powers and privileges conferred upon us. He will require us to live up to every law He has given us. If He has given us no verbal law, He will require us to live up to the law of conscience, to the light which He has bestowed upon us, be it great or little. The heathen are responsible according to the light they possess; but they do not carry the same responsibility that we do, if the Gospel in its fullness has not reached their ears.

The Christian world have been greatly favored. They have received the Scriptures of divine truth, published in many languages, and distributed among millions of earth's creatures. This bible, which is as a lamp thrown down from heaven, is given to light men through this earthly probation. Those who reject it do so to their condemnation; as do those who privately interpret what was given by the power of the Holy Ghost, when men of old wrote as they were moved upon by the Spirit of the Eternal. This Bible is given to disseminate light unto all to whom it shall come, who will be judged by it, whether they have faithfully studied it, or have been dilatory and negligent in searching the record in which they think they have eternal life.

This was a mistake which was made by the ancient Jews. They had a Bible. They had Moses and the prophets, and therein they were instructed. What to do? Among other things to prepare themselves for the coming of the Messiah. But when He came He was rejected, despised and cast out by His own, by the people unto whom He came, especially, to commit the keys of everlasting life for the salvation of mankind; choosing them for a peculiar mission just as He has chosen this people for a peculiar mission. He said to the Jews, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they testify of me." In other words: "If ye are unwilling to receive me, to receive my testimony that I am the Son of God, I judge you not harshly; but I say unto you, search your own Scriptures, search Moses and the prophets, for they testify of me." But would they do it? If they did they were unwilling to interpret them correctly. They could not believe that this humble, poor and despised Nazarene, who went about without a place of shelter, who said the fowls of the air have nests and the beasts of the field have lairs, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head. They could not accept Him as the Messiah. They had a preconceived notion as to what the Messiah should be. They thought He would come as a mighty warrior. They thought He would be greater than David their ancient king; that He would lift from their necks the yoke of bondage and burst the fetters of the Roman power which held them bound. They thought He would come as a king, a conqueror, and deliver them from their enemies and restore the kingdom to Israel. But they had misinterpreted the Scriptures which were given them. They were all the time thinking of the second coming of the Messiah, the King of Kings, the Redeemer who would deliver His people by the power of His might, with an outstretched arm, a wonderful display of glory, eclipsing by the magnitude of His miracles the great deeds of antiquity, of which they were so proud, which were written of in the Scriptures they cherished. They were looking for this kind of a Savior. Being a warlike, proud and haughty race, they preferred that kind of a Redeemer, which answered best the ideal they had formed. They were not prepared for this humble, despised "man of sorrows, acquainted with grief," who walked through fields of corn plucking the ears that were growing, to satisfy His hunger; who mingled with wine-bibbers and publicans, giving as His reason therefor that the whole need not a physician, but they who are sick, they who are ailing, they who are sinful—these were the ones that needed to be brought back into the fold. He went where He could find the humble and lowly and the finger of scorn was pointed at Him for His merciful deeds. He was called a wine-bibber because He went among them for the purpose

of turning them from the error of their ways; He was called wicked because He came to rescue men from wickedness, to save them from their sins, and not, as Lucifer, to save them in their sins and take them with their iniquity into the Kingdom of God as a stench in the nostrils of Jehovah. This was the mistake the Jews made. They did not read their Bible aright. They were not humble enough to read that there was to come just such an individual as this Jesus of Nazareth. So they cast Him out, in their pride, their prejudice, and their preconceived notions of what He ought to be, because He failed to conform to their idea.

The ways of God are not as man's ways. They are as high above the ideas of man as the heavens are above the earth; for this Jesus of Nazareth was humble as He was, poor as He was, lowly as He was, was God's idea of a hero, a leader, and a savior to His people. He made Himself the servant of servants. He did not arrogate to himself authority before He received it. Because He was the Son of God it did not prevent Him bowing in humble submission to John the baptist, the Priesthood being upon that man, and he alone being qualified to baptize men at that time. Jesus submitted to him. Many in this day would call Him a serf, a slave, for so doing. The Latter-day Saints are called slaves—slaves, because they acknowledge the authority of God; because they recognize that the Priesthood is upon the earth, that delegated divine authority, and that they must bow to it and honor it, just as Jesus of Nazareth honored John the Baptist, or else they shut the gates of mercy upon themselves. Jesus did not usurp this authority. He waited till He received it. He went down into the waters of baptism and set the example by being buried in the water, and then of the Spirit, which descended upon Him from heaven in the sign of a dove, and a voice from heaven was heard saying: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Well pleased for what? Because of His humility; because He honored the Priesthood; because He did not deem Himself greater than the one who held the power to baptize Him. And when He commissioned His Apostles He said: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned." Why were they to be damned? Because they believed not. Who would damn them? They would damn themselves. They shut themselves out when they refuse to exercise faith in God, when they shut down, as a man might do in a building enveloped in flame, making no effort to save his own life, exercising no faith, no power which is inherent in him as a gift from God, and thinking that somebody else is going to save him. Such a man is very apt to be consumed by the devouring element from which he makes no effort to save himself. So it is with those who refuse to live up to the light within them. They shall be condemned because they condemn themselves, they shut the gates in their own faces.

God has established the principle that men must be saved by their own works. Faith without works is dead; it is a misnomer, for there is no faith without works. Everyone who refuses to work, refuses to put his or her faith into exercise, refuses to accept the way of salvation while it is within their reach, will damn themselves, shut themselves out from the Kingdom of God, and He cannot help it, for it is inconsistent with eternal justice. God is interested in the salvation of all men, for the more of His creatures that are saved the greater is His own glory in consequence. But He saves men according to their merits, in different degrees of glory. For, as Paul says, there is one glory of the sun, another of the moon, and another of the stars, and one star differeth from another star in glory so shall it be in the resurrection of the dead. We have it in our power to attain to whatsoever glory we work for. We will receive that which we earn. We will either blaze like the sun or beam like the moon, or twinkle like the stars, according to the choice we make, and the measure of our faithfulness. God will not take away our free agency. The stars of the heavens differ in lustre and magnitude as a simile of the different degrees of glory which God reserves for those who wait for Him and serve Him. There are laws governing each of the Kingdoms, whether it be a celestial Kingdom, or a glory compared to the stars; a terrestrial Kingdom, a glory compared to the moon; or a celestial Kingdom, the highest of all, of which the sun at noonday is written as being typical. There are laws governing all these, and men cannot attain to either glory unless they abide the law and conditions which pertain to it.

The gospel of Jesus Christ in its fullness is the way to the celestial kingdom. Every law must be obeyed. Every round of the ladder must be climbed. Every step must be taken. There must be no faltering. There must be no weakening of the knees. There must be no turning aside, no running backward, but a steadfast onward pushing towards the goal for which we have set out. We have it in our power to carve out our own futures. God has placed it in our power. We can exercise the faith within us to that extent that it will develop and expand our souls, so that when we receive a fullness of glory, it will be a fullness of celestial glory, and we will bask in the light of God's countenance for ever and ever. But they who refuse to obey the law pertaining to