

DISCOURSE

BY

PRESIDENT JOHN TAYLOR,

DELIVERED

In the Assembly Hall, Salt Lake City,
February 12th, 1882.

REPORTED BY GEO. F. GIBBS.

It is well sometimes for us to reflect upon the position we occupy before God; it is well for us to understand the relation we sustain to each other; it is well for us to comprehend the relation that we sustain to the Church and Kingdom of God; it is also well for us to know the position that we occupy in relation to the world in which we live. As intelligent beings it is for us to comprehend all truth so far as we are capable of understanding it.

The Gospel is spoken of as being light; and when it was introduced by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ it was then said, that light had come into the world. But while light had come into the world there was a certain class of people that loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Jesus, in alluding to himself, said: I am the true light. And He is spoken of as being the light that enlightens every man that cometh into the world. And again it is said of Him: the light shineth in darkness, but the darkness comprehendeth it not. There are many very significant sayings on the same subject, that afford food for thought and reflection.

The Gospel of the Son of God has always been obnoxious to a great portion of the human family. In it there is too much light, too much truth, too much intelligence; for the bulk of mankind; its principles are too pure, too noble, too elevating to accord with the general feelings of humanity and with that spirit that proceeds from the powers of darkness, and which rules in the midst of the children of disobedience. And hence people generally have been opposed to it, and they are opposed to it to-day. People oppose it, but they do not comprehend it. They speak against it; but they speak of that which they know not of. And while they think we are superstitious and ignorant, we know that they are; there is no doubt on that question. We know that they "understand neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm." Therefore to us they are objects of commiseration more than anything else.

Talk of Christianity and of the Gospel of the Son of God, in all the ages of the world whenever and wherever it was proclaimed, there was a spirit of hostility and antagonism manifested towards it from the very first. We may go back as far as the days of Cain. We read that Adam had two sons, named Cain and Abel. Cain lent himself to the enemy of all righteousness and became what is termed in Scripture, the father of lies. He rebelled against God, and rebelled against his father, and instigated by the spirit of enmity which proceeds from the evil one, he killed his brother.

These things are not always understood nor the reasons for them. But it has been revealed unto us that Cain loved Satan more than he loved God, and that he placed himself under his influence. And when Cain and Abel offered up their sacrifice, Cain offered his at the instigation of the devil; and his sacrifice, of course, was not accepted. God knew his heart and the feelings by which he was actuated, and therefore rejected his offering. Then came Lucifer, the devil, and says to Cain, "I told you the Lord would treat you wrong; He has treated me wrong;" and he instigated him to kill his brother, which he did. And why? Because his brother believed in God, and obeyed God; and because he believed in the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ which had been made known to them; because he believed these principles, and because Satan was opposed to them he instigated Cain to kill his brother.

It looked a rather awkward thing for the world under these circumstances. As we read it—there were two sons, one of them righteous, the other wicked; the wicked killed the righteous, and the world was left under these influences to a certain extent. But then Adam had other sons and other progeny, and he himself was there; and he believed in God, and blessed God for having revealed the Savior, and the plan by which he and his children were to be redeemed from the fall, which he had been an active participant in bringing about, which, probably, was all right that it should be brought about. And from that time the spirit of antagonism existed between the two principles; the power of God and the power of the adversary. It had commenced, in fact, before that time. Lucifer and those that were associated with him were cast out of heaven because they rebelled against God their Heavenly Father. They were not willing that He should carry out the plan of redemption and salvation which He had devised before the world was; and having been cast out of heaven, he, with them, became full of wrath and of hostility against the purposes and designs of the Almighty in regard to the salvation and exaltation of the human family. And this spirit continues to grow and extend; and the descendants of Cain multiplied as did the other descendants of Adam.

By and by another seed was raised up to Adam, namely Seth, to stand in the place of Abel. "For God (said Eve) hath appointed for me another seed in-

stead of Abel whom Cain slew." And he became the representative of God, as Adam was the representative of God. He took Abel's place as the representative of God and the laws of God; and he had revelation, and the Priesthood, and the Gospel, and was acquainted with the principles of truth. Finally there was a number of prominent men of whom we read, but of whom a very short account is given; no matter, it is not necessary to enter into details on these subjects, but I wish to touch upon some of the leading points thereof.

After a while wickedness had spread very extensively upon the face of the earth; so much so, that we read that the thoughts of men were evil and that continually; and it became inexpedient in the Lord to permit the people to live to perpetuate their corruptions and infamies. And, therefore, God decreed that He would cut them off from the face of the earth, that they should not have the power to perpetuate their species, and thus become the fathers and mothers of lives and be the media through which the intelligent, pure spirits that existed in the eternal world should receive bodies or tabernacles. They were to be deprived of that privilege.

But before this was done the Lord sent messengers among the people proclaiming to them what was about to befall them if they did not repent and turn from their evil ways. Enoch was one of these; he stood at the head of that dispensation. He, as we are doing, sent out missionaries among the people who had become very numerous. Their mission was to call upon the people to repent and to obey the Gospel, and to believe in the Son of God and to obey His law; and to tell them that God had prepared a scourge for those who would not repent, that they would be destroyed from off the face of the earth by a flood; and the people thus destroyed should be cast into prison, a prison which God had prepared on purpose for them. And when these men went to preach this doctrine many believed on them and they were gathered together, as we are, unto a place which they called Zion. And they were placed under the direction of the Holy Priesthood, men who were inspired of God, with whom He communicated and whom He taught in all the principles pertaining to the Gospel of the Son of God; and they continued in this condition for a length of time. And as they gathered out from among the people, the Spirit of God was withdrawn from among the people; and they became exceedingly angry, angry at Enoch and angry at those who preached the Gospel to them. And the nature of men is just about the same now as then. They spoke all manner of evil against the servants of God who ministered among them; they rejected their testimony, and not only that, but, like some of the very pious people in our day do towards us, they thought it would be doing God service to sweep these men off the face of the earth. And they thought so earnestly, for they gathered together their armies for that purpose. The Saints were under the immediate direction and guidance of the Lord, and were, therefore, governed by revelation, and the power and Spirit of the Lord rested upon Enoch. And he rose up and prophesied and told the wicked of the fate that awaited them; and the power of God rested upon him in a marvelous manner, so much so, that the mountains trembled and the earth shook, and the people were afraid and fled away from his presence, because they could not endure it. Their armies were scattered, and they failed to accomplish that which they in their wickedness had designed to do.

But still the same spirit that animated them continued to grow and increase. And finally after the Saints of that day had become sufficiently taught, they and their city—that is, the great majority of them and their city, ascended up to heaven. We are told in the Scripture—which is a meagre account of it, that—"Enoch was not, for God took him." And we may add, Enoch's city and Enoch's people were not, for God took them; they were translated. The principle of translation was a principle that at that time existed in the Church, and is one of the principles of the Gospel, and which will exist in the last days.

Many of those that were left, continued to bear testimony to the truths taught by their predecessors; and they themselves were caught up from time to time, according to certain revelations communicated through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

The spirit of antagonism to the truths of God and to the order of God and to the law of God, and to the Priesthood of God and the Gospel of the Son of God, continued to exist. By and by the flood came, and the things spoken of by the men who had preached among them, were fulfilled, and the people swept from the face of the earth. They were shut up in prison, in the prison house which had been prepared for them. A few people were left, eight only—Noah and his wife, and his three sons and their wives.

One of the great evils that existed among the people was that the sons of God married the daughters of men; or, in other words, many who were connected with the Church mixed themselves up with those who were not; and thus their hearts were drawn away from God, and in the sight of God they were no better than those who rejected His servants, and consequently they perished with the disobedient and wicked.

There is something associated with these things that it may be necessary

to refer to. It is necessary there should be opposing principles, light and darkness, truth and error, virtue and vice, good and evil, etc. It is necessary that man should go through a state of probation and trial, that he should have the opportunity of receiving or rejecting correct principles, or the Gospel of the Son of God. And it is a further development to us, that if men have not had this opportunity upon the earth, they will still have it. There is a further principle exhibited here in relation to this matter. Those very men who rejected the Gospel in their day were visited by Jesus after He was put to death in the flesh and was quickened by the Spirit; He went, we are told, and preached to those spirits in prison who had been disobedient in the days of Noah. And connected with that there is another principle; it is to place all mankind on the same footing, that all men of every age and nation may have the same privilege. And we are informed they will have. And hence, the Gospel is an everlasting Gospel; the Priesthood is an everlasting Priesthood; the work in which we are engaged commenced with our Father in heaven, it has been revealed from time to time to man upon the earth, and it will continue in all its power, fullness and glory in the eternal worlds, until all things that God has designed pertaining to the welfare and exaltation of the human family will be accomplished.

In relation to these things there are some remarkable passages contained in the Bible. For instance:

"As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

And knew not until the flood came and took them all away! so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

This is a very significant Scripture, and if correct is pregnant with the greatest consequences to the human family; if not correct then everything we believe in is a phantom and our worship and religion are vain, and not only ours, but everybody else's. But if such a personage as Jesus existed and if He spoke those words, He most assuredly spake the truth, and they will most assuredly be fulfilled.

Now, in speaking of the two great principles, the two opposites, it must needs be that there be opposition in all things; that is, darkness as opposed to light; error as opposed to truth; evil as opposed to good, etc. We are told by one of the old Apostles that the "Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;" and the spirit of evil is envy, hatred, malice, lying, slandering, uncharitableness, etc. We are told also in the Book of Mormon the same things precisely. Whenever we see lying, slandering, enmity, hatred, malice, we see the fruit of the spirit of darkness, no matter how pious the people are who profess these sentiments and who operate therein. And this is carried out still further in the revelations of John; the Lord through him says: "For without [the city] are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." Such characters have no place within; but those who fear God and work righteousness, who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, they will be introduced into the presence of God to participate with Him in the glories there referred to.

Hence, while these things here upon the earth make men feel exceedingly unpleasant, exceedingly unhappy and uneasy, when they get through and expect to get to heaven they will find themselves outside the city, because the pure would not have [such society] among them, neither would they here. It is necessary, I say, that those principles should exist in order to test men, to try and prove them. It was necessary that Jesus should be tried in this way. We are told that "it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." And again, when John saw an innumerable company clothed in white, one was heard to ask, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?" The answer was: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple."

There is something very interesting for Saints to reflect upon in relation to these matters. And there is something that goes a little further than we think about sometimes; and that is, while we profess to be followers of the Lord, while we profess to have received the Gospel and to be governed by it, a profession will amount to nothing unless we have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It is not enough for us to be connected with the Zion of God, for the Zion of God must consist of men that are pure in heart and pure in life and spotless before God, at least that is what we have got to arrive at. We are not there yet, but we must get there before we shall be prepared to inherit glory and exaltation; therefore a form of godliness will amount to but little with any of us, for he that knoweth the master's will and doeth it not shall be beaten with many stripes. It is "not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but He

that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." These are doctrines of the Gospel as I understand them. And it is not enough for us to embrace the Gospel and to be gathered here to the land of Zion and be associated with the people of God, attend our meetings and partake of the Sacrament of the Lord's supper, and endeavor to move along without much blame of any kind attached to us; for notwithstanding all this, if our hearts are not right, if we are not pure in heart before God, if we have not pure hearts and pure consciences, fearing God and keeping His commandments, we shall not, unless we repent, participate in these blessings about which I have spoken, and of which the Prophets bear testimony.

However, to proceed in relation to these matters I said that it was necessary there should be opposing powers and that men should be tested and tried as Jesus was and just as other people have been. And why? Having passed through this ordeal that we may overcome the evil with the good; for it is to him that overcometh, said Jesus, that I will grant to sit down with me upon my throne, as I have overcome and sit down upon my Father's throne. It is not to him that puts on the armor only, but to him that fights the good fight of faith and overcomes the world, the flesh and the devil; for him there is laid up a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give unto him.

That power and spirit that disturbed the elements and affected the people of the old world still operates among the children of men, and it is—I was going to say a necessary adjunct to the Gospel, in order that men may be tried and proven. Jesus, of course, understood these things when He said, "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Said He, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." There is something very pleasing in reflecting upon these things. To be thrown into a world of evil where strife and corruption exist, and to be mixed up with it; and then to have sent to them the principle of truth, a spark of intelligence descending from the throne of God, the light of the everlasting Gospel, which if men receive in their hearts will bring them into communication with God their Heavenly Father, and make them to feel that they are fighting on the side of God and the right, for everything that ennobles and has a tendency to exalt man. There is something worth striving for in a battle of this kind, and there is something glorious in being able to conquer. It tries men's souls sometimes. Peter, you know, trembled under it; but Jesus said, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." I say unto you fear Him; never mind the other power. You have drank from the river the streams whereof make glad the city of our God. The light of eternal truth has beamed upon your minds, and your hearts have been glad in the hopes of eternal life which have been presented to you when under the influence of the Spirit of God. You have rejoiced in the hope that blooms with immortality and eternal lives. Filled with this Spirit you feel that you are an eternal being having the principles of the everlasting Gospel within you; that you have received the everlasting Priesthood, that you are associated with principles that will exalt and ennoble man in time and throughout the eternities to come. There is something pleasing about it.

And when these miserable "dogs" howl and the coyotes yelp and exhibit their folly and nonsense—I was going to say, who the devil cares? Some people would think it is impious to say a thing like that. Yes, and the same people think it very honorable to lie in order to oppose the truth. No matter what men think of these things. I am not very precise in choosing my words in reference to such matters.

But then, did we expect to get along much better? People are very much exercised about us. Well, let them exercise themselves. They are very much troubled. Let them trouble themselves. I am pleased to witness the spirit of calmness and quiet and unconcern that exists among the Saints of God. It is the Spirit of God and the Gospel of the Son of God that gives that. And it is for us to continue to do right and keep the commandments of God; and let us be careful that when men tell these horrible stories about us, that they are not true. Blessed are you when men revile and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for Christ's sake; but if they should speak evil of us and that evil be true, then there would be no blessing connected with it. We could tell a great many things truthfully against these same people that slander and lie about us; but it is a dirty business, a business that reflects no credit upon any one that is engaged in it. Let them take their course. We can afford to move upon a higher plane, doing good to them that injure us; and we can pray for those who evil entreat us, that we may be the children of our Father in heaven, who makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good, and His rains to descend on the just and on the unjust. Who, let me ask, were to be pitied during the time of the flood? the people that disbelieved and disobeyed the Gospel, or the people that were caught up to heaven? Would you feel very sorry

for those who were connected with the Zion of God, or would you feel sorry for those poor, miserable, little-souled, ignorant people who rejected God and His law, and who in consequence had to be swept off from the face of the earth—which class would solicit your commiseration?

To-day God has revealed to us great principles; and He is desirous that we should do right and obey His law and keep His commandments.

Among other things there is a great hue and cry about what they call polygamy and what they call bigamy; but our plural marriage is no more their bigamy than white is black or than light is darkness, but seemingly neither they nor their judges nor legislators either can or do want to comprehend the difference between the two, great as it is. It would seem that they either do not know or do not want to know the difference between a man's marrying a second wife without the consent or knowledge of the first wife and in doing so deceiving the one he marries, who believes him to be a single man; and a man's marrying a second wife with the knowledge and consent of the first wife, and living with his wives in honorable wedlock, performing the duty of a husband to them and of a father to their children, and maintaining sacredly his marriage vows. I would suggest either a little gas or electric light be turned on, and that it be allowed to shine upon the visions of their dull understandings; it may help them some. But it is evident that men do not want the truth, therefore they must believe as they choose in regard to these things; it is really a matter of no moment to us. But for the information of such people, if there be any, let me say, their bigamy is deception and fraud and a breach of the marriage covenant; while our polygamy, as it is called, is the fulfilling of the marriage covenant, it is honorable and the fruits of it are good; theirs is done clandestinely, ours openly; we acknowledge ours, they repudiate theirs. They judge us from their own standpoint, and their eye being evil, of course, they see nothing but evil in us. With them a man may have his wife and also be mixed up with other women, and while he may be rolling in wealth, at the same time, perhaps, his poor, unfortunate offspring, the product of his vice and corruption may be sweeping the crossings of the streets of our large cities, begging from his father a penny to help to support a miserable existence. This is compatible with their high state of civilization and purity. God save us from such "Christianity," from this time, henceforth and forever. ["Amen" from voices in the congregation.] We do not want it. We would say in relation to that what a Prophet said on a certain occasion, "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; into their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united." We expect to be associated with more honorable principles, and with more honorable people in time and throughout all the eternities to come.

There is one thing I wish to say, we do not practice to them this very obnoxious doctrine of polygamy for them to practice. Our Elders are sent forth to preach faith, repentance and baptism for remission of sins. The doctrine of plural marriage does not belong to people who are governed by such principles as they are, people who break their marriage vows and who wink at those who do it, people who violate their sacred honor with the opposite sex and trample upon and destroy millions of the daughters of Eve and drag them down to death and destruction—it does not belong to such people; it belongs to the people who have obeyed the Gospel of the Son of God, the people who are in possession of the principles of life, and who are keeping the commandments of God; it does not belong to Latter-day Saints even unless they are pure and virtuous; unless they are honorable and worthy they cannot be associated with any such thing, much less can the class that I have referred to who are making so much noise about it; so they need not trouble their heads.

These things you Latter-day Saints understand. When President Hayes was here, in conversing with him I told him that it was not our intention to crowd our peculiar ideas upon the religious world; that we had received the doctrine of plural marriage as a part of the Gospel, and that it was only for pure men and pure women, that class, and that class only, could receive it and practice it and make it honorable; it was not for the licentious and corrupt, but for those who feared God and worked righteousness, who were true to themselves and true to the female sex, and who would stand by and sustain them and preserve them in purity and honor. There is quite a difference, you perceive, between the one and the other.

We are seeking to carry out the word and will of God according to the revelations which he has given unto us, all of which are based upon truth, virtue, purity and holiness, principles that are eternal, that always have existed and always will exist. The Christian world make their covenants for time only; we for time and for eternity. They expect to be associated with their wives "until death do them part;" we expect to be associated with ours not only for time but for eternity. They not entering into any covenants for eternity, assume no obligations beyond this life; but I am sorry to say, it is quite a common thing among them to violate the covenants they make pertaining to this life. But that I may not be misunderstood let me say further with regard to this there are many honorable people!