

God the Source of All Good—The Common Love of Man for Increase—The Necessity of Righteously Directing Our Powers

Discourse by Elder John Taylor, delivered in the 13th Ward Assembly Rooms, Salt Lake City, Sunday Afternoon, Jan. 5, 1873.

I take pleasure in meeting with the Saints. I like to break bread with them in commemoration of the broken body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and also to partake of the cup in remembrance of his shed blood, and then to reflect upon the associations connected therewith: our relationship to God through our Lord Jesus Christ; our relationship to each other as members of the body of Christ, and our hopes concerning the future; the second appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, when, we are given to understand, he will gird himself and wait upon us, and we shall eat bread and drink wine with him in his Father's kingdom. I like to reflect upon all these and a thousand other things connected with the salvation, happiness and exaltation of the Saints of God in this world, and in the world to come.

We have one day set apart in seven for the worship of God, and I think it a very great mercy we have, for we can thus draw aside from the world, its cares, perplexities and anxieties, and, as rational, intelligent, immortal beings, reflect upon something pertaining to the future. We are very much engaged, generally, in relation to things of time and sense. Our hearts, feelings and affections seem to be drawn out in this direction, and these are the only things which a great many people have in view. Jesus, in speaking to his disciples, tells them not to take any thought about what they shall eat or drink, or wherewithal they shall be clothed, for, said he, after all these things the Gentiles seek. We, of course, must take this as being specifically addressed to his disciples under the circumstances in which they were then placed; the principle involved in his words is nevertheless true. Says he, "Consider the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Again, he says, reflect upon the fowls of the air, they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father takes care of them, and will he not also take care of you, O ye of little faith?

There is something beautiful in reflecting upon many of these subjects, and something, very frequently, that is quite in harmony with our feelings when they are in accord with the Spirit of truth and the light of revelation. We feel, then, that we live in God, and as the Scriptures say, that in him we move and have our being. If we have life, or health, or possessions; if we have children, and friends, and homes; if we have the light of truth, the blessings of the everlasting Gospel, the revelations of God, the Holy Priesthood, with all its blessings and government and rule, all these and every true enjoyment that we possess come from God. We do not always realize this, but it is nevertheless true that to God we are indebted for every good and perfect gift. He organized our bodies as they exist in all their perfection, symmetry and beauty. He, as the poet has expressed it,

"Makes the grass the hills adorn, And clothes the smiling fields with corn, The beasts with food his hands supply, And the young ravens when they cry."

He is merciful and kind and benevolent towards all his creatures, and it is well for us to reflect upon these things sometimes, for we thus realize our dependence upon the Almighty.

In speaking of the affairs of this world, it is often asked by many—"Why, should we not attend to them?" Of course we should. Do we not talk of building up Zion? Of course we do. Do we not talk of building cities and of making beautiful habitations, gardens and orchards, and placing ourselves in such a position that we and our families can enjoy the blessings of life? Of course we do. God has given us the land and all the necessary elements for this purpose, and he has given us intelligence to use them. But the great thing he has had in view is, that whilst we use the intelligence that he gives us for the accomplishment of the various objects that are desirable for our well-being and happiness, we should not forget him who is the source of all our blessings, whether pertaining to the present or the future. Mankind everywhere and in all ages have universally manifested a desire to obtain the things of this world—gold, silver, houses, lands, possessions, &c. This desire is inherent in man; it was planted in our bosoms by the Almighty, and is as correct as any other principle if we can only understand it, control it, and rightly appreciate the possessions and blessings we enjoy. The earth was made for our possession. The lands, waters, mountains,

valleys, the trees, the minerals, vegetation of all kinds, plants, shrubs and flowers—all these things were made for the use of man, and it is for us to appropriate them to their proper use, to estimate them at their proper value, and as rational, intelligent, immortal beings, to comprehend the object of the creation of these things, as well as the object of our creation, and why and how, and under what circumstances we can enjoy them, and how long we can retain possession of them. In examining the human mind you will find many correct feelings and instincts planted there, if men would be governed by them. I do not know but it is this the Prophet has reference to when he says, "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth it understanding." Another Scripture says that "God has given to every man a portion of his Spirit to profit withal;" but then, many men do not profit by it; and although they have this light or intuition within themselves, they are not governed by it. There is a party of religionists in the world, called Quakers, so strongly impregnated with this idea, that they think that this inward monitor is sufficient to guide men in all their acts in life.

There are certain political principles (I am referring to the freedom of the human mind), that are very pertinent on this point. When the framers of the Declaration of Independence assembled on this continent, far away from other nations and peoples, in reflecting upon governments and man, the very first thing that they struck upon was this—"We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, and they are endowed by their Creator with certain *inalienable* rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Almost simultaneously with them, or I believe a very little after, I will not be positive as to the date, a number of gentlemen got together in Paris, France, to lay the foundation of a government which they thought would be a government of the people, and they expressed themselves in almost similar words to those which were expressed here. And you will find, in examining the history of the world, that whenever mankind have been oppressed or bound down, there has generally been a reaction, a continual striving among the people to liberate themselves from their bondage, to gain freedom and the exercise of those inalienable rights of which I have spoken.

One great principle which has existed among men from the beginning of creation until now, is a desire, planted within them by the Almighty, to possess property—lands, houses, farms, &c., and in a national capacity, to possess territory, to increase their boundaries, and to extend their rule and dominion. As I said before, this principle is correct, only it wants controlling according to the revelations of God.

Our time on the earth is very short and transitory. No matter what we acquire it amounts to but very little, and we soon leave it. There is no great statesman, warrior, king, emperor or general, who has acquired extensive territory, but who has had to leave it soon. This is the universal history of mankind. You may go back to the old Assyrian empires, or examine the history of the kings of Babylon and Nineveh, and the mightiest among them have passed away after a brief exercise of power; no matter how extensive their possessions were. Read their history in the Bible and, although some affect to despise that book, it is the best history we have, and contains a hundred times more information in relation to those old nations than you can find anywhere else. When the Medes and Persians dispossessed the Assyrians, they had just the same ideas as the Assyrians had—they wanted to extend their territory, and they did it, but what did it amount to? Not very much when we speak of it as immortal beings; when we speak of it as mortal beings, as butterflies that flutter around for a short time, and then die, it might be a sort of transient, passing glory, like a sunbeam when the sun shines from behind a cloud—it appears very brilliant, but it soon passes away. So it was with their glory, and where is it now? Why you can scarcely find where their mightiest cities stood. People think they can, but there is nothing definite about it, and their glory, pomp and majesty have no more existence now than their cities. They had a correct principle planted in their bosoms, but, it was perverted and corrupted, and they sought by fraud, strategy, war, robbery and plunder to possess themselves of dominion, empire and authority, and when they got through, they had to lie down among the silent dead; and could neither move a hand, stir an arm, move a leg nor open an eye, but had to be devoured by worms.

That is the history also of the Grecian and Roman kingdoms. It was said of Alexander that after he had conquered the world he sat down and wept because there was nothing more for him to subdue, and I have heard it said frequently, in regard to individuals, that they wanted everything in their own grasp; and if they had had a world, it would not have been big enough, they would have wanted a little piece outside to make a garden patch. We see man here striving anxiously for the possession of lands, houses and so forth. That is all right enough, but it wants

to be corrected. I will refer you to some Scripture about Abraham. We read that God took him upon a certain hill, and told him to lift up his eyes eastward, westward, northward and southward, and said to him, "To thee and to thy seed after thee will I give this land." Here was a promise made by God. Of course Abraham ought to have felt interested in it. But was it pertaining to this world only? No, certainly not. I mean was the promise confined to Abraham's lifetime? No, certainly not. Then what had it reference to? These are questions that demand our serious attention and consideration. We find also that there was a promise made to Joseph, that he should possess a land, rich and fruitful, abounding in the precious things of the earth, and the precious things of the mountains, and of the everlasting hills; that should abound in corn, wine and oil, and the rich blessings of life, and that he should become a multitude of nations in the midst of the earth. These blessings were spoken by men who were just, as it were, tottering on the brink of the grave, by Moses and Jacob, for instance, who put their hands on the heads of their descendants and blessed them previous to their departure. How was it in regard to the promise made to Abraham? Did he really possess that which was promised him? Certainly not. Yet God promised. Then why did not Abraham possess that which was promised? Because it was not necessary at that time. Stephen, in talking about it, I suppose about eighteen hundred years after, says that "God promised these things to Abraham, but nevertheless he gave him none inheritance in it, no not so much as to set his foot on;" but, says he, he will give it to him and his seed. That is, they shall by and by inherit. This was the idea and feeling they had in relation to this matter. They did not consider the world at that time in a perfect state, and men who understand themselves do not consider it in a perfect state today. Abraham and his seed had that land given to them and they will possess it, redeemed and renewed, when it will be worth having. Well, then, how is it? A good deal as it was with the rich man that Jesus spoke of in his day. He had gathered around him a great quantity of property, and said he, "Soul, sit down and be at rest, do not trouble thyself any more, take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry, for thou hast much goods laid up for many years." Jesus says, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee," and then whose shall these things be which thou possessest? Would he have them? No. Who would? Perhaps his children and wife, perhaps not, just as it happened; there was no dependence then any more than now about such things. All that the rich man knew was that his soul would depart, and that his body would be placed in the ground to feed the worms. These things ought to lead us to reflection. As I said before, the principle or desire to acquire the goods of this world is in itself good, but it has been perverted by man; and when Gentiles and "Mormons" seek for nothing but what they shall eat and drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed, they are both fools, for they do not know at what time their souls will be required of them.

If man were to live up to the privileges with which he is surrounded; if he followed the light of revelation and sought for and became acquainted with God, and correct principles in relation to the future, he would not want to lay up so much the treasures of the earth as the treasures of eternal life. But you are now talking of spiritual things? No, I am not, I am talking about temporal things, and I will go back, and examine some men who have lived here on the earth, Job, for instance. He said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand in the latter day upon the *earth*, and that I shall see him; and though worms feed on my body, yet in my flesh I shall see God." Job, when he was resurrected, expected to stand upon and to inherit the earth in the latter days, when the earth should be redeemed.

Another prophet, speaking of the same things, says, "I shall stand in my lot in the end of the days." He also expected an inheritance upon the earth. And then, the ancient apostles, in talking about these things, said that the Saints should live and reign on the earth after the resurrection, when the earth should have become purified. Hence it is very natural for a feeling of this kind to be planted in the bosoms of men, that is, an attachment to the earth, for it is man's eternal inheritance, but that feeling must be sanctified.

Who is it that will possess the earth? Is it those ancient monarchs who fought, conquered, subdued and slew their thousands, waded through seas of blood to gain empire? No, not at all. Is it the man, who, by fraud, deception, trickery, dishonesty and chicanery, took advantage of those around him, and so amassed large wealth and possessions? Verily no. Who will, then? Let Jesus speak. Says he, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." They are the ones who will rejoice before God in the possession of the blessings of earth, and not the kings and other characters to whom I have referred. One of the prophets saw the end of these kings and rulers, and he says, "They were gathered together, as prisoners are gathered together, into a pit, and they were shut up for many

days, and after many days they will be visited." They will have some chance of salvation and of an exaltation, but they have to remain in prison for many days, like the antediluvians had, before Jesus went to preach to the spirits in prison, who were sometimes disobedient in the days of Noah.

We have a great many principles innate in our natures that are correct, but they want sanctifying. God said to man, "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowls of the air, and the creeping things that creep on the face of the earth." Well, he has planted, in accordance with this, a natural desire in woman towards man, and in man towards woman, and a feeling of affection, regard and sympathy exists between the sexes. We bring it into the world with us, but that, like everything else, has to be sanctified. An unlawful gratification of these feelings and sympathies is wrong in the sight of God, and leads down to death, while a proper exercise of our functions leads to life, happiness and exaltation in this world and the world to come. And so it is in regard to a thousand other things.

We like enjoyment here. That is right. God designs that we should enjoy ourselves. I do not believe in a religion that makes people gloomy, melancholy, miserable and ascetic. I would not want to spend my life in a nunnery, if I were a woman, or in a monastery if I were a man; and I would not think it very exalting to be a hermit, and to live by myself in a poor miserable way. I should not think there was anything great or good associated with that, while everything around, the trees, birds, flowers and green fields, were so pleasing, the insects and bees buzzing and fluttering, the lambs frolicking and playing. While everything else enjoyed life, why should not we? But we want to do it correctly and not pervert any of these principles that God has planted in the human family. Why, there are some people who think that the fiddle, for instance, is an instrument of the devil and it is quite wrong to use it. I do not think so, I think it is a splendid thing to dance by. But some folks think that we should not dance. Yes, we should enjoy life in any way we can. Some people object to music. Why music prevails in the heavens, and among the birds! God has filled them with it. There is nothing more pleasing and delightful than it is to go into the woods or among the bushes early in the morning and listen to the warbling and rich melody of the birds, and it is strictly in accordance with the sympathies of our nature. We have no idea of the excellence of the music we shall have in heaven. It may be said of that, as one of the Apostles has said in relation to something else—"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive of those things which are prepared for those who love and fear God." We have no idea of the excellency, beauty, harmony and symphony of the music in the heavens.

Our object is to get and cleave to everything that is good, and to reject everything that is bad. One reason why religious people in the world are opposed to music and theaters is because of the corruption that is mixed up with them. Wicked and corrupt men associate themselves with these things, and degrade them; but is this any reason that the Saints should not enjoy the gifts of God? Is that a correct principle? Certainly not. It is for them to grasp at everything that is good, and calculated to promote the happiness of the human family.

I remember the time very well, and many of you do, when we used to commence our theatrical amusements here by prayer. We do not do so much of it now. This practice is put to one side. I suppose one was right and the other is right. I merely speak of these things. All our acts should be sanctified to God. You know that we are in the habit of having parties occasionally. I will give you my ideas about some of them. I have attended one or two lately, and I think we are running rather wild, and that we do not act as much like gentlemen and ladies as we should, nor quite as much like Saints as we ought to do. I think there is a great deal of impudence and pertness, a great amount of interfering with other people's rights in these places, and I think that we need correcting, that is, in our Ward. I do not know how it is here in yours. Perhaps you do better here. I am speaking of things as I see them. I think we ought to elevate everything of this kind to its proper standard. We ought not to intrude upon or take advantage of anybody, even in amusements. When this is not observed, I will tell you what it leads to: it leads to a separation in society, inducing men and women who desire to be polite, refined and courteous, to keep out of the company of those who do not take this course, and produces, if you please something like an aristocracy, which is very repugnant to the wishes of good feeling men and women. But they have either to do this or to be run over in many instances.

I speak of these things for your information. I do not know that you need any information of this kind here. I

suppose I ought to have delivered this lecture in our Ward. In all our amusements we should see that things are conducted right, and we should never forget to act the part of ladies and gentlemen, and we should do away with frowardness and impudence, and treat everybody with kindness, courtesy and respect. I speak of these things because they strike my attention. But perhaps I have said enough on this subject.

We are here—a number of Saints. Well, you have outsiders among you. That is none of our business, they are not us. I am now talking to Saints. We have come here to fear God and keep his commandments. I do not expect to frame my religion, ideas or amusements to suit the feelings of any man under the heavens. I want to get my inspiration from God, and be led by him, and I want to honor him in all my acts. I do not care what this, that, or the other man does. Know ye not that God has called us from the world to plant among us the principles of eternal truth, to teach us correct principles, and to show us how to conduct ourselves towards one another, and towards all men? To show us also how to enjoy life, what course to pursue to elevate ourselves in the world, and to bring up others to our standard? We should never descend to others. That is my feeling, but I have seen some do it. Go out among the Indians here, and you will see traders among them who, instead of lifting up the Indians, go right down to them. I do not object, myself, to have good, decent, respectable, honorable men associated with us more or less; but I do object to descending to the morality of the wicked and corrupt. I do not believe in drinking, or in the lasciviousness and dishonesty that are practiced by many who call themselves honorable men. I want nothing to do with them, and I say, “My soul, enter not thou into their secrets; and mine honor, with them be not thou united.”

We have come here for the purpose of elevating ourselves, and of elevating the people that we are among. We have come here to build up Zion, to be taught of the Lord, to establish righteousness, and to prepare a people for his coming. What is there in the world that we do not know? We knew their religion, philosophy and morality before we came here. We came here in order that we might prepare a people for the time when the bursting heavens shall reveal the Son of God, when creation shall feel his power and cease to groan, and when all people under the heavens shall say, “Blessing, glory, honor, power, might, majesty and dominion be ascribed to him that sits on the throne and the Lamb forever.” We came here to introduce principles in regard to our religion, morals, social status, the covenants that we make with God, and all things pertaining to this world and the world to come. And because of this, heavy responsibilities devolve upon us as parents, Elders in Israel, Bishops, Presidents, High Priests, Seventies, and in every office in the Priesthood and all the various avocations in life, that we may be able to say, finally, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, I have done that which is right, I have been full of integrity, virtue, holiness and purity, and hence is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give unto me, and not unto me only, but to all those who love the appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” These are some things we are after, the attainment of which ought to be the object of our existence.

Well, but is it not right for us to have lands? Certainly, we have come here for the purpose of building up a Zion, and we ought to use all diligence for its accomplishment. You Saints possess facilities here that people never possessed before. Do you realize this? Perhaps that is stretched a little. I expect that in the days of Enoch they had a splendid time and that they lived in a very happy manner. But we are living in the dispensation of the fullness of times, when God is gathering all things together in one, and he has brought us from different nations, countries, climes and peoples. What to do? To make fools of ourselves? Is our object to live as the wicked do—to be “covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, heady, highminded, despisers of those who are good, to have a form of godliness without the power?” No, we came here that we might learn the laws of the Almighty, and prepare ourselves and our posterity for thrones, principalities, powers and dominions in the celestial kingdom of our God. We talk sometimes about Zion that has got to be built up in Jackson County; also about a New Jerusalem that has to be built and prepared to meet a Jerusalem that shall descend from the heavens. How do our lives and actions compare with these things? Are our hearts, feelings and affections drawn out after them, or are we forgetful and our minds swallowed up with the affairs of time and sense? Are we preparing our children for this time, and spreading an influence around us wherever we go to lead people in the paths of life and lift them up to God? Or are we taking a downward course—come day, go day, just as it happens? I think we ought to wake up and be alive, and endeavor to pursue a course that will secure the smile and approbation of the Almighty. Everyone of us, as fathers, mothers and Elders of Israel, ought to cultivate the Holy Ghost in our hearts, and let it burn there

like a living fire. We ought to draw near to God, and receive from him light and life and intelligence. We ought to seek for wisdom to manage our youth, that they may grow up in the fear of God. Well, we are doing this, more or less? Yes, very well indeed, in many respects, and in many respects very poorly. I feel led to talk of these things, and what I am led to refer to, I speak about. We ought to be preparing our youth to tread in our footsteps, if they are right, that they may be honorable members in society, that when we get through in this world and go into the other, we may leave behind those who are full of integrity, and who will keep the commandments of God. We ought to teach our children meekness and humility, integrity, virtue and the fear of God, that they may teach those principles to their children. No matter about many of these furbelows, or whether they can dance round dances or not; that is not of very great importance. No matter whether they are in the tiptop of fashion, or whether their feathers and ribbons are all right, only get the spirit, heart and feelings right. Let the heart be drawn out to God. Let there be an altar in every house, and let the sacred fire burn on that altar. Seek to implant in the hearts of your youth principles that will be calculated to make them honorable, highminded, intelligent, virtuous, modest, pure men and women, full of integrity and truth, who will represent you correctly, that is, if you walk correctly, and if not, that will represent, at any rate, the principles of truth which you profess to believe in, that they with you may have an inheritance in the kingdom of God, and inherit the earth, for Jesus says it is the meek that will inherit the earth.

There are many things that we may hear that we do not fully comprehend; and we perhaps see many things that are distasteful. But never mind the actions of men, especially the leaders of the Church and kingdom of God. You are not their judges. God is. You follow their counsel, and if they and you have the Spirit of God, you will see eye to eye. The Scripture says, "The watchmen will see eye to eye when God brings again Zion," perfect in holiness. If you have committed sin, pray that God may forgive it. If your family has sinned, pray that God may forgive them, and lead them in the right path, and do not be too censorious about others. We are none of us perfect, we all need mercy, and if we exercise judgment without mercy, perhaps judgment without mercy may be meted to us. Let us be merciful. Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Let us have our hearts right, our spirits pure and our affections sanctified, and let us seek to promote a love of those principles among our youth everywhere where we go, that we may be blessed of the Lord and our offspring with us. Then when Zion shall be redeemed and the purposes of God shall be accomplished, no matter whether we possess much or possess little, God will be with us, and he will bring us off victorious, and we shall join in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and has risen again, to receive glory and honor, and power, and might and majesty and dominion;" and if we are faithful, we shall live and reign with Christ on the earth.

May God help us to be faithful the name of Jesus. Amen.