

Privilege of Meeting Together—We Are Here to Do Our Father's Will—All Dependent Upon God for Assistance, Guidance and Direction—The Lord Revealed to Adam the Purpose of Sacrifice—Adam, Before His Death, Called His Family Together and Blessed Them and Prophesied—Many Spirits Have Been Destined to Hold Certain Positions Among Men—Why We Are Gathered—We Must Follow the Teachings of the Spirit, and Honor the Priesthood in All Its Callings—Prepare Ourselves to Enter Holy Places—The Priesthood Must not Tolerate Iniquity—The Church Must Be Purified—Concluding Exhortations

Discourse by President John Taylor, delivered at a Priesthood Meeting, held in the Salt Lake Assembly Hall, Saturday Evening, October 6th, 1883.

It is quite a privilege for us to meet together in such assemblies as this—to associate with the Priesthood of the Son of God, which Priesthood is also after the order of Melchizedek, and after the power of an endless life. It is a great privilege for us to meet together, to talk over the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, and to reason and reflect upon those things that God has revealed for our salvation in time and throughout the eternities that are to come. It is proper that we should comprehend the various positions of men in relation to this Holy Priesthood, and further that we should understand the various orders, callings, ordinances and organizations associated with the Church and Kingdom of God upon the earth; that we each of us may be prepared to magnify our calling, to honor our God, and to pursue that course always which shall be acceptable in the sight of our Heavenly Father.

We are here as Jesus was here, not to do our own will, but the will of our Father who sent us. He has placed us here; we have a work to do in our day and generation; and there is nothing of importance connected with any of us only as we are associated with God and His work, whether it be the President of the Church, the Twelve Apostles, the Presidents of Stakes, the Bishops, or anybody else, and we can only thus be of any service by placing ourselves in a position to act as God dictates us; as He regulates and manipulates the affairs of His Church in the interests of humanity, in behalf of the living and of the dead, in behalf of the world in which we live, and in behalf of those who have lived before us, and who will live after us. We can none of us do anything only as we are assisted, guided and directed by the Lord. No man ever lived that could. Adam could not. Noah could not. Even Jesus could not. Nor could the Apostles. They were all of them dependent upon the God of Israel to sustain them in all of their acts. And in regard to Adam himself, as we are, so was he very ignorant of many principles until they were revealed to him. And if they were revealed to him they did not originate with him; and so it was with others. We find that Adam was directed of the Lord to do a certain thing—that is, to offer up sacrifices—and when the angel of the Lord came to him and said: “Adam why do you offer up sacrifices?” Adam replied, “I do not know; but the Lord commanded me to do it, and therefore I do it.” He did not know what those sacrifices were for until the Lord revealed unto him the doctrine of the atonement and the necessity of the fall of man, and pointed out to him the way and manner to obtain an exaltation. Then he and Eve his wife rejoiced exceedingly at the mercy and kindness of the Almighty, and realized that even in their fall they were placed in a position to obtain a higher glory, and a greater exaltation than they could have done without it. Now, who revealed this to them? The Lord, through the ministering of an holy angel; and in relation to the dealings of God with all of the human family it has been precisely the same. We are told, for instance, that when Adam had lived to a great age—that three years before his death he called together his family—that is, some of the leading branches thereof who held the Holy Priesthood, mentioning the names of many of the more prominent that had received certain peculiar blessings from the hand of God—and there was manifested to him all things that should transpire to his posterity throughout all the future generations of time, and he prophesied of these things; and also upon those who were with him, rested the spirit of prophecy, and he blessed them, and they turned around and blessed him and called him Michael the Archangel, the Prince of Peace,

etc. By what spirit then did Adam prophesy, and under what influence was he operating at that time? We are told in Scripture that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, and he in common with his sons who were then associated with him were in possession of that spirit which enlightened their minds, unfolded unto them the principles of truth, and revealed unto them the things that would transpire throughout every subsequent period of time. Who manifested these things? The Lord. Who organized the world? The Lord. Who made man upon it? The Lord. Who placed upon it the fowls of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fish of the sea? The Lord. Who sustains all things by his power? The Lord. Who controls the affairs of the world? The Lord. To whom are we indebted for life, for health, and for every blessing that we enjoy? To the Lord. He is the God of the earth, and the giver of every good and perfect gift which we enjoy, and He desires to gather together a people that will observe His laws, that will keep His commandments, that will render obedience to His will, that will submit to His authority, and for this purpose, in different ages of the world, He has introduced the Gospel and has placed man in possession thereof.

Now, what about the positions of men? Why, it is a good deal as spoken of in the Scriptures and in the revelations which have been given to us pertaining to these matters—that many have been called and chosen, and that many were elected and selected to fulfill certain offices. It was so revealed to Abraham. He was told that there were a great many spirits, many of whom were noble, who were destined to hold particular positions among the children of men, and it was said to him, “And thou Abraham wast one of these.”

Now, there are events to transpire in this day as there have been in other days; and we, the Elders of Israel of the Church of the living God, have to build up the Church of God, the Zion of God, and the Kingdom of God, and the Church has to be purified according to the law, order, rule and dominion which God has appointed. It is not for us—as the brethren have expressed it—to receive certain portions of light and intelligence, and with regard to other portions follow the desires of our own hearts, thus laying aside God, His rule, His dominion and His authority. “Having begun in the spirit,” as Paul said, “are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” No, that is the wrong way about; but on the contrary we ought to add to our faith virtue, to virtue brotherly kindness, to brotherly kindness charity, to charity godliness, that we may be full of the light and life, and of the spirit and power of God, and approach more closely to the law of God, and be governed thereby.

Why are we gathered here to the land of Zion? This is called the land of Zion. We are called the people of Zion. What does Zion mean? The pure in heart. Why are we gathered here? One of the Prophets in talking about it, says: “I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.” What then? “I will give them Pastors according to mine own heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.” That is what we are here for. That we may be fed with knowledge and understanding, that we may learn the law of the Gospel, the law of the Zion of God, the laws of the Kingdom of God, and that we may be instructed in all things tending to promote the welfare, exaltation and happiness of ourselves, our wives, our children, the people with whom we are associated, and the world in which we live and act; and that we may operate for the benefit of those who have lived, and stand as “saviors upon Mount Zion.”

In all this, as has been said, there is an order. We are all dependent the one upon the other. The head cannot say to the foot I have no need of thee, nor the foot to the head I have no need of thee, nor the hand, the arm, the leg to the body, I have no need of thee. We are formed into a compact body according to the law of God in the organization of His Church, and it is for us to magnify the callings unto which we are called, and unless we all of us are placed under the guidance and direction of the Almighty, we cannot do so—that is, those who do not yield themselves subject to the law of God, cannot do that thing. But those who yield themselves subject to the law of God, can do it and do it quite easily, for Jesus says: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Now, if we yield obedience to God and to the spirits that dwell within us, then will our light become like that of the just that shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day; but if we do not yield an obedience to the law and word and order of the Church and Kingdom of God upon the earth, the light that is within us will become darkness, and then, as it is said, how great is that darkness! We see sometimes men of that character. They are occasionally referred to as cranks, or, as the Germans use that term, *sick*. They lose the light, spirit and power of God, and they do not

comprehend the order of the Church and Kingdom of God, nor do they place themselves in the way to obtain knowledge of these things. The first thing they begin to do is to try to pervert the order of God, and to find fault with their brethren in the Holy Priesthood—with their Bishops, with their Bishop's Counselors, with the High Council, perhaps with the Presidents of Stakes, as the case may be, or with the Apostles, or with the First Presidency; no matter which, or how, or when, or where. Now, if these men were walking in the light as God is in the light they would have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Christ would cleanse them from all sin; but when they begin to murmur and complain, to find fault and to give way to improper influences, they give place to the devil, and he takes possession just as fast and as far as he can, and forces upon them feelings, ideas and principles that are at variance with the law and order, and word and will of God.

What, then, are we here for? What did Jesus come to do? He tells us that He "came not to do His own will, but the will of His Father who sent Him." How are we to obtain a knowledge of that will? I will tell you what Joseph Smith told me. I have frequently mentioned it. Between forty and fifty years ago he said to me this: "Elder Taylor, you have received the Holy Ghost. Follow its teachings. Sometimes it will seem to you as though it was hardly the right way. No matter, follow its teachings, and it will always lead you right, and if you do so it will, by and by, become to you a principle of revelation, so that you will know all things that are necessary for you to become acquainted with." Now, I know that is true. I know that he spoke the truth. And I would say that it is the privilege of every Elder in Israel who has received the gift of the Holy Ghost, to follow its teachings. What was said by one of the old Apostles? "As many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God." Follow its teachings, therefore, and do not give way to your own feelings, nor to covetousness, to pride, nor to vain glory; for we none of us have anything to boast of. We have none of us received anything but what God has given us. If we possess light, or intelligence, or a knowledge of the things of God—which we do—from whence did it emanate? From God our Heavenly Father, through the medium that He has appointed. I do not wish to dictate to Him the way these things shall be done. I never did. While Joseph Smith was on the earth I looked to him as a Prophet of God, and I do not believe I ever disobeyed Him in one solitary thing that he ever required at my hands, and I have been put in some pretty tight places. But that was my feeling, that was the idea I entertained towards the Priesthood of the Son of God.

I have also lived in wards. I do not know that I have ever disobeyed the requests of a Bishop. Why? Because he presided over me in a ward capacity, and if he had a right to respect me as an Apostle, I had a right to respect him as a Bishop, and I always felt a desire to comply with all the requirements that were made of me by any of the proper authorities. I feel and always have felt the same towards Teachers. If a Teacher came to my house—or Teachers, they generally come two at a time—if I happened to be there I have told them that I felt happy to meet with them, and I called together the members of my family that were within my reach, and told them that the Teachers had come to instruct us. Permit me here to ask, have not I a right—say as the President of the Church, or as an Apostle, which I was for many years—have not I a right, or my family a right to possess the same privileges that others possess, and to have the Teachers come to inquire after my welfare and that of my family, and to see that there is no wrong existing—have not I that right? I think I have. If they are the servants of God, have not I a right to listen to them? Yes, I have, and I feel it my duty to receive them kindly, treat them properly and listen to their teaching.

On the other hand, when the Teachers got through, I might give them a little instruction, say as an Apostle, or as a brother—put it any way you like; that while I and my family were receiving benefits from them, it was my duty, on the other hand, to teach and instruct them in some things that I thought might benefit them.

Now, these are correct principles in the Church and Kingdom of God. The Teacher occupies his place; the Priest and Deacon occupy their places; the Elder occupies his place; the Bishop his place; the High Councils their places; the Presidents of Stakes their places, and every one in his position ought to be honored—the Twelve in their place, the First Presidency in their place—each one yielding proper respect and courtesy and kindness to the other. And when we talk about great big personages, there is no such thing. We are none of us anything only as God confers blessings upon us, and if He has conferred anything upon us, we will give Him the glory.

Having been called to these positions, God expects that we will honor them; that we will esteem it an honor to be

the messengers of salvation, the legates of the skies, to the nations of the earth. We have a great work to perform both at home and abroad. We are preaching the Gospel to the inhabitants of the earth. Israel is being gathered home to Zion. And in Zion we are rearing temples to the name of the Most High God. And I will tell you how I feel—that as these temples are advancing, while we are preparing holy places in which to administer the ordinances of God pertaining to the living and the dead—I feel that we ought to begin to prepare ourselves to enter into these holy places, and to feel that we are the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. We ought to wake up and put our houses in order, and our hearts in order; we ought to conform to the word, the will, and the law of God; we ought to let God rule in Zion, to let His law be written upon our hearts, and to feel the responsibility of the great work we are called upon to perform. We should see that our bodies and our spirits are pure, and that they are free from contamination of every kind. We are here to build up the Zion of God, and to this end we must subject our bodies and our spirits to the law, to the word, and to the will of God. Being here in Zion we want to see that thing that Jesus told His disciples to pray for take place. “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” How was it done in heaven? God spake and the worlds were formed according to His word. God said let us do this, and that and the other, and it was so. Was there anybody in heaven to object and say, “Don’t you think you had better put it off a little. Would not this be a better way?” Yes, the devil said so, and he says so yet, and he is listened to sometimes by sinners and sometimes by Saints; for we become the servants of those whom we list to obey.

There are besides these other considerations in connection with these matters.

The brethren who have preceded me this evening have referred to the celestial, terrestrial and telestial kingdoms, and the laws pertaining thereunto. We are told that if we cannot abide the law of the celestial kingdom we cannot inherit a celestial glory. Is not that doctrine? Yes. “But,” says one, “Are not we all going into the celestial kingdom?” I think not, unless we turn round and mend our ways very materially. It is only those who can abide a celestial glory and obey a celestial law that will be prepared to enter a celestial kingdom. “Well,” says another, “are the others going to be burned up, etc.?” No. Do you expect everybody to walk according to this higher law? No, I do not. And do I expect those that do not, are going into the celestial kingdom? No, I do not. Well, where will they go? If they are tolerably good men and do not do anything very bad, they will get into a terrestrial kingdom, and if there are some that cannot abide a terrestrial law, they may get into a telestial kingdom, or otherwise, as the case may be, etc., etc. Did you ever read in your Bibles that “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” Did you ever read of the parable of Jesus, where He speaks of the sower going forth to sow, and some seed fell by the wayside, some among thorns, and some on stoney ground, etc.? “But,” says one, “we thought we had got it all.” Yes; but the thorns have grown up in many places and choked the good seed. Sometimes you keep down your weeds in the field, but do they come up again? Yes; fresh crops keep coming all the time; and I think, too, that the wheat and the tares were to grow together for a certain length of time.

Well, what shall we do? Shall we go to work and get angry against people that do not do exactly right? No. They can only do right as God helps them to do it. They can only do right as they seek to God for His help to enable them to do so; they can only do right as they are sustained by the power of God; and if we allow covetousness, pride, envy, jealousy, hatred, malice, lasciviousness, drunkenness, Sabbath breaking, or any other influence to corrupt and lead us astray from the light of truth and the sweet consoling influences of the Spirit of God, we shall get into darkness, and then, as I said before, if the light that is within us becomes darkness, how great is that darkness! It is for us to do right—to observe the law and to keep the commandments of God. It is right also for the Presidents of Stakes and for the Bishops to see that none of these things that I have referred to be permitted among the people over whom they preside. What! Shall we not let the drunk-ard wallow in his drunkenness? No; deal with him according to the law of God. Shall we not let the lascivious man wallow in his corruption? No. According to certain principles that are laid down in the book of Doctrine and Covenants in regard to those things, those who have entered into the new and everlasting covenant, and have taken upon themselves certain obligations, if they commit adultery it is positively said they shall be destroyed. Now, can you change that, or can I change it? No, I cannot, and you cannot; and you have no right to permit men to break the Sabbath, nor to do many of those acts that many of the Saints are doing. What are Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers, Evangelists,

etc., placed in the Church for? What were they for in former days? For the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Jesus Christ. What are the High Councils and Bishops' Councils for but to adjudge all these things? What are the Teachers and the Priests for? To assist the Bishops in their endeavors to promote purity and virtue, holiness and righteousness among the people. That is their office, and if they do not fulfill that office they are not magnifying their calling. They have no right to condone the sins of men. The law of God is perfect converting the soul, and we must be governed by that law and carry it out, or be made amenable unto the Lord our God for the course we pursue, or for neglecting to perform our duties. That is the way I look at these things, and if that is not the case, why are these laws given to us. Are they the laws of God? We so understand them. Then let us perform our duties and seek to magnify our callings that we may stand approved and acknowledged of the Lord.

When I speak of these things, I do not believe in any kind of tyranny. I believe in long-suffering, in mercy, in kindness, in gentleness, and in the love and fear of God. I do not believe that the Priesthood was given to man to exercise dominion and authority over the souls of other men. Everything ought to be done with kindness and long-suffering, yet with fidelity to God. The Church must be purified from iniquity of every kind, that we may stand before God "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing;" that when we get our temples finished we may enter therein, approach the living God, and call upon Him for blessings, for life and salvation for ourselves and others, for deliverance from our enemies, and God will hear our prayers if we will only be obedient and observe His law. God is on our side. All heaven is on our side. The ancient Prophets and Patriarchs, and the Son of God and God the Father, are enlisted in the cause of Zion. It is for us to be true to ourselves, and I ask no odds of this world or of its powers. ("Amen") God will take care of His Saints, but we must be careful to be Saints.

Arise! therefore, ye Elders of Israel—ye Priests, Teachers and Deacons, ye Presidents of Stakes, Bishops and High Councilors, ye Apostles and First Presidency, and all of us—Arise! and let us go to work with a will to do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven: for if ever that is done, where is it to start, do you think, if it does not begin here among us? God expects it at our hands. We are full of weaknesses and imperfections, every one of us; but we want to learn the word, the will, and the law of God, and to conform to that word and will and law. Let that law be written upon our hearts. Let us seek to magnify our callings and honor our God, and the Lord will take care of the balance. We need not trouble ourselves much about our enemies. They have their ideas, we have ours. We will do as we have done. We will do the best we can with them, put our trust in the living God, and pursue a course that is wise, prudent and intelligent. We will glory not in ourselves, but in the Lord of Hosts. We will dedicate ourselves, our wives, our families, our houses and our lands, and all that we possess to the Lord, and feel that we are His children. If we do this, He will bless us with life, health and prosperity. He will control the efforts of our enemies in the future as He has done in the past. And here I feel to call upon every soul to bless and magnify the God of Israel for His mercies extended to us in the past; for putting a hook into the jaws of our enemies that they have not had power to harm us, and He will continue to do it, if we will continue to be faithful, only much more so; and woe unto them that fight against Zion, for the Lord God of Hosts will fight against them. Amen.