

ONE HUNDRED THIRD

Annual Conference

OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS



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With Report of Discourses



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SECOND DAY

MORNING MEETING

The third session of the Conference was opened promptly at 10 o'clock a. m., by President Heber J. Grant announcing that the congregation would sing the hymn, "How firm a foundation, ye Saints of the Lord."

After the singing of this hymn, Elder Byron O. Colton, President of the Roosevelt Stake, offered the opening prayer.

A duet, "The Morning Land," was sung by Miss Rae Miles and C. T. Packard.

ELDER GEORGE F. RICHARDS

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

In filling a Sunday appointment some years ago to speak in the Tabernacle and while talking I incidentally mentioned our life before we came here upon the earth. I do not remember just the expression used, but I was not discoursing particularly upon the subject of man's pre-existence. I perhaps made the statement that we ought to be as faithful and valiant in this life as we were in the life before we came here. At any rate at the conclusion of the meeting, as I walked down the steps from the pulpit I was met by a small group of tourists, one of whom, a well-dressed and intelligent woman of middle age, seemed to be the spokesman for the group. After making a few comments of a complimentary character, this lady made the astounding statement that she was a relative of the former Confederate President of the United States, Jefferson Davis; that her father was a minister of the gospel, and that his father before him was also a minister of the gospel, and that she had been a regular attendant at church services all her life, but never before had she heard taught or suggested that man had a living existence before coming here upon the earth.

PRE-EXISTENCE NOT UNDERSTOOD

I think perhaps I was as much surprised at hearing her make this statement as she was in hearing what I had said about pre-existence.

The principle of man's pre-existence is so well established by the Old and New Testaments, as well as the other standard works of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, that it seemed to me almost impossible that men who had studied for the ministry, and who are supposed to interpret the word of the Lord as contained in the Bible, could be misled or be unable to see that principle plainly. I have since made inquiry in my travels and in my association with those who are not of our faith and have found that Christian people generally do not believe in nor do they understand the principle of man's pre-existence.

One minister with whom I talked at considerable length while riding

on a railroad train, at the conclusion of our conversation said that it might be that Jesus Christ had a former existence, but that he could not admit that much of men generally. Inasmuch as this principle of man's pre-existence is so fundamental in the plan of the Gospel and is a key to the understanding of many passages of scripture without which they could not be properly understood, I thought I might speak upon this subject this morning.

A SPIRITUAL CREATION

I call attention to the very first chapter in Genesis, which gives an account of the creation of the earth and of vegetation upon the earth, of animals and also of man, and which is really a spiritual creation, but which men and women seem not to have understood. In this account we read that God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." It plainly tells us that man was created in the image and likeness of his Maker. And then after the account is given we are told that the Lord rested from his labors on the seventh day.

It would seem that everything pertaining to the creation had been then completed. But when we read the second chapter of Genesis we find that what is recorded in the first chapter is an account of a spiritual creation.

"These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,

"And every plant of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.

"But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

Notwithstanding an account had been given in the first chapter of the creation of man and of other things, the second chapter of Genesis gives an account of the creation of all those things that had been created spiritually. This would seem to be sufficiently plain that men and women studying it would be able to reach a conclusion that the earth and all things pertaining to it—vegetation, animals and man—had really a spiritual creation.

In the Book of Moses, in the Pearl of Great Price, is given an account of the spiritual creation as the Lord revealed it to Moses:

"And I, the Lord God, had created all the children of men; and not yet a man to till the ground; for in heaven created I them; and there was not yet flesh upon the earth, neither in the water, neither in the air; * * *

"All things were before created; but spiritually were they created and made according to my word." (Moses 3)

We have additional information pertaining to this great principle in our standard works that helps to make more plain and easy to be understood this very important principle.

WAR IN HEAVEN

In the last book of the New Testament we have an account of the

war which took place in heaven, which of course could not have been had there not been people engaged in it. In the twelfth chapter of the Book of Revelation we read as follows:

"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels.

"And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

Speaking of the dragon, we read in the fourth verse:

"And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth."

So that we understand without any further revelation that this same Lucifer was the one who rebelled in heaven, and he was cast out and with him one-third of heaven's host.

In Jude 1:6 we read:

"And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

In Hebrews 12:9 we have a reference to the relationship we sustain to God:

"We have had fathers of our flesh which have corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?"

I wonder how men and women can read such scriptures and not understand pre-existence.

THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

We read in the first chapter of John:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

"The same was in the beginning with God.

"All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."

John here refers to the Son of God, as expressly stated in another verse of that chapter:

"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

So that we might read that scripture, "In the beginning was Jesus Christ, and he was with God, and he was God"—thus showing a plurality of Gods, or in other words, God the Father, and God the Son. "All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made."

FIRST-BORN AND CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

Even before he was born into this world as a babe in Bethlehem,

he must have had an existence and a power, even that of a God, to create the heavens and the earth and all things therein.

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Colossians makes a similar statement, that all things were created by him, visible and invisible. He makes a further statement that he was the first-born, which expression implies at once that there were others born as well as he of the same kind of birth. It is clear that no reference is made there to his birth in the flesh, for he came in the meridian of time. It was some other birth, and what other but that when he was born of his eternal Father in the spirit as we were born? And thus this principle is established—the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. How men who do not understand the principle of pre-existence can understand the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man I cannot comprehend.

LOVE OF GOD AND FELLOW MEN

We read in the scriptures that the first great commandment is that we shall love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind; and the second is like unto it, we shall love our neighbor as ourselves, remembering that blood is thicker than water, and that things earthly are typical of things heavenly. We know that by reason of the relationship we sustain to God our Heavenly Father and to our fellow men we should love them—love the Lord with all our heart and that sincerely, and love our fellow men and serve them, because they are in very deed our brothers and our sisters.

ONE INDIVIDUAL FROM BEGINNING TO END

By an understanding of this principle of pre-existence we understand the evolution of man, if that is a correct expression, or his eternal progress, following in the footsteps of the Savior, the First-born, being born of God in the spirit, having a spiritual existence and then coming here upon the earth to have an earthly existence, passing on through death to another spiritual existence, and then the resurrection, and through faithfulness and obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel go on to eternal life and exaltation. There is just the one individual from beginning to end. The fallacy of the reincarnation of man theory is here made apparent, as also the doctrine of evolution, in which it is taught that man originated with the lower animals, the very lowest type, and came up by degrees.

We rejoice in the knowledge of the Gospel, that we are of noble ancestry, that we are indeed sons and daughters of God; and understanding this we realize what manner of men we ought to be, which could not be understood but for this knowledge of pre-existence. The origin of man is here set forth as well as his eternal progression. The origin of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is hereby understood as taught in the scriptures.

BEFORE THE WORLD WAS

The Prophet Joseph Smith made use of this expression:

“At the first organization in heaven we were all present and saw the Savior

chosen and appointed and the plan of salvation made, and we sanctioned it." (Compendium, p. 288)

His statement is confirmed by scripture as follows:

Revelations 13:8: "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Also I Peter 1:19, 20: "But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world.

The proper interpretation is of course that in the council of heaven before the world was, Christ our Lord, was chosen to be the Savior of mankind, to come in the meridian of time. He is characterized all through the scriptures as the Lamb of God, the Lamb without blemish. And when God gave Adam a charge to build an altar and offer a sacrifice, it was a type of that sacrifice which was to be made by the Lamb of God. It was to be a lamb, one of the firstlings of the flock and without blemish. How beautifully it represents the Son of God!

The purpose of his being chosen before the world was is explained in the scripture as follows (I Cor. 15:21, 22):

"For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

THE AUTHOR OF SALVATION

This shows that the fall was understood as a part of this great plan of the Gospel before the world was, and provision was made to redeem mankind from the fall.

We read further (Heb. 5:8, 9):

"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."

It must have been understood then that the atonement which he was to work out when he should come upon the earth should be the means of redeeming mankind from their sins on condition of obedience unto the laws and ordinances of the Gospel, as set forth in the third article of our faith:

"We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel."

THE PLAN OF SALVATION

This is a part of the Gospel which was instituted in the heavens. We have no account of God instituting any other Gospel, any other plan of salvation, and anything in conflict with that plan as there ordained and taught by Christ our Lord and his disciples will be contrary to the mind and will of God and calculated to lead men away from rather than to the Lord and the plan of salvation itself. Just one Lord, one faith, one baptism—God the Eternal Father, and Jesus Christ his Son, the Savior of the world.

I feel grateful in my soul for this light that has come to us in connection with all the other light and knowledge of the Gospel which we have received.

GOD AT THE HELM

I know, brethren and sisters, of the truth of this work. I know that it will endure. For a century men have tried to disprove its truth—intelligent men, learned men—and they have signally failed. They ever will. This work is to go on, it is God's work, he is at the helm and directing it, and those who are at the head of the Church here on the earth are his viceregents. At the present time, Heber J. Grant, the President of this Church, as the prophet, seer and revelator and God's mouthpiece to this Church, is directed by the same spirit that has directed his predecessors, and this work has never halted for a moment from its inception until the present time. It never will, it will go on until God's purposes shall have been fully consummated, until our Lord shall come and take possession of this, God's kingdom upon earth, and shall rule as King of kings and Lord of lords.

May the Lord add his blessing to this testimony, I ask in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

ELDER RICHARD R. LYMAN

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

IF WISDOM IS LACKING—

A boy, age fourteen, was troubled in his mind about religion; he was uneasy. At times he was greatly excited. There was tumult everywhere in his neighborhood. In this confusion and distress, although but a lad in years, this wise young man sought the Holy Bible.

The whole world today is likewise in confusion. Men's hearts are failing them. Their lives are filled with despair. Many are unemployed, multitudes discouraged. How many of these, and perhaps it may be well for me to say, how many of us, during these trying conditions, have gone to this great, this good, this Holy Book in search of something that will point the way?

The boy opened the Holy Book to the first chapter of James and read:

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

ASK OF GOD

Again and again he reflected upon these divine words. He was certain that if any one ever needed wisdom he needed it then. How to act he did not know. He concluded that unless he could get more light, more wisdom, he would never know. At length came the conclusion that he must either remain in darkness or else do as James suggested, ask of God. This young man therefore retired to the woods to make the effort. It was on a clear day early in the spring of 1820 and it was