



Type: Magazine Article

Discourse by Elder Heber J. Grant

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Source: *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, Vol. 60, No. 23 (9 June 1898)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 353–358

Abstract: Grant testified at the Salt Lake Stake Conference, March 13, 1898, that one can know gospel truths and later apostatize through disobedience. Grant reads Oliver Cowdery's testimony of the Book of Mormon and quotes him as saying that the reason he left the Church was because he had sinned and he hoped to rejoin the Latter-day Saints.

June 9
1898

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR.

For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.—II COR. 2: 17.

No. 23. Vol. LX.

Thursday, June 9, 1898.

Price One Penny.

DISCOURSE BY ELDER HEBER J. GRANT.

THE following remarks were made by Elder Heber J. Grant at the Salt Lake Stake Conference, in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Sunday afternoon, March 13th, 1898.

It is a source of great pleasure to me to once more stand before the Latter-day Saints in this Tabernacle. As most of the Latter-day Saints assembled are aware, it has been nearly a year since I have occupied this position, during which time I have undergone a very serious surgical operation, which, according to the medical journals, should have ended my life. It is recorded that it is impossible for a man to recover who is in the condition that I was found to be in at the time of the operation. But I am grateful to be here; and I feel to thank my Heavenly Father, and the brethren of the Priesthood who administered to me and blessed me during the ordeal and promised me that I should recover. Since that time I have also been very sick with pneumonia. Some years ago I tried to insure my life, but the companies refused. Their physicians told me that if I ever took pneumonia I would die. But I am still here, notwithstanding the report of the physicians of the life insurance companies. It is a source of pleasure to me to again mingle my voice with the Latter-day Saints, and to bear testimony to the knowledge that I possess of the divinity of the work in which we are engaged.

I do not know whether in my weak condition I will be able this afternoon to preach to you or not. I may find that after speaking a few moments it will be necessary for me to discontinue my remarks. But while I stand before you I desire the light and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to aid and assist me in what I may say, and I desire the faith

and prayers of the Latter-day Saints, because I know that the Lord hears and answers the prayers of the faithful Saints. I know that I have been abundantly blessed, in standing before the people to speak to them, in answer to the faith and prayers of the people that have assembled. It is a source of pleasure to me at home or abroad, in public or in private, to bear my testimony to the divinity of the work in which we are engaged and to the knowledge that I possess that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God, that Jesus Christ was the Savior of the world, that God lives, and that He hears and answers the prayers of those who in humility and in honesty of heart supplicate Him for the light and inspiration of His Spirit. I have met many people who have questioned my testimony. They have said, "Mr. Grant, you cannot know these things." But I am ready and willing to bear testimony that I do know them, and I know them as well as I know light from darkness, warmth from cold. I know after supplicating the Lord I have received answers to my prayers. Therefore, I have a knowledge of these things, and I know them as well as I know that I love my family and my friends. This knowledge has come to me in such a way that I am ready and willing to bear testimony to all the world, and I know that I will have to face the testimony that I bear. I would not be true to myself if I did not, when occasion offered, bear testimony of the things that I do know. Many people I have met have said, "Mr. Grant, how do you account for the fact that many of those who have borne witness of their knowledge of the divinity of the work called Mormonism, and of the divinity of the mission of the Prophet Joseph, have afterwards turned away from the Gospel of the Latter-day Saints and become its bitter opponents?" I simply answer that there is no promise made to any man, woman or child, no matter what testimony they may receive, or what light and intelligence may come to them from God, that they shall remain firm and steadfast in the straight and narrow path that leads to life eternal, only as they shall keep the commandments of God. I know of no individual among the Latter-day Saints who has been faithful in attending to his family and secret prayers, in attending to his public and his quorum meetings, who has been ready and willing to pay one-tenth of his income annually as a tithing to the Lord, who has observed what is known among us as the Word of Wisdom—I know of none such, I say, who has fallen by the wayside. But I know of many who, notwithstanding many great and marvelous things have been manifested to them, have fallen by the wayside, because they have neglected the duties and responsibilities which have rested upon them as Latter-day Saints.

One of the most remarkable of the revelations contained in the Doctrine and Covenants I consider to be that contained in Section 76. That revelation was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. Yet, notwithstanding this wonderful revelation and manifestation to Sidney Rigdon, all those who were in the Church in early days know that that man neglected his duty and failed to keep the commandments of God, and he fell by the wayside. I will quote a few passages from this revelation:

"And while we meditated upon these things, the Lord touched the eyes of our understandings and they were opened, and the glory of the Lord shone round about;

"And we beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of His fullness;

"And saw the holy angels, and they who are sanctified before His throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship Him for ever and ever.

"And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of Him, this is the testimony last of all, which we give of Him, that He lives;

"For we saw Him, even on the right hand of God, and we heard the voice bearing record that He is the Only Begotten of the Father—

"That by Him and through Him, and of Him the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God."

They heard the voice bearing record that He is the Only Begotten of the Father! They saw the holy angels that were sanctified before the throne, worshiping God and the Lamb! And yet Sidney Rigdon fell by the wayside!

There is, to my mind, no stronger testimony of the divinity of the work in which we are engaged than the very fact that men who receive these wonderful manifestations fall by the wayside if they do not keep the commandments of God. The Lord sustains only those who sustain Him, and who keep His commandments and live according to the light and knowledge they have received after obtaining a testimony as to the divinity of this work.

We find that Oliver Cowdery, one of the witnesses to the divinity of the Book of Mormon, fell by the wayside, after having signed his name, in connection with the other witnesses, to the testimony which is contained in this book:

"Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people unto whom this work shall come, that we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken; and we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for His voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true; and it is marvelous in our eyes, nevertheless the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment seat of Christ, and shall dwell with Him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen.

OLIVER COWDERY,
DAVID WHITMER,
MARTIN HARRIS."

Oliver Cowdery, the chief scribe for the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the leading witness here, fell by the wayside. Not only did God reveal to him and declare by His voice that this is a correct record, translated by the power of God, but this same man, Oliver Cowdery, in connection with the Prophet Joseph Smith, had bestowed upon him the Aaronic Priesthood by John the Baptist, the man who baptized our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He also had bestowed upon him the Melchisedek or Higher Priesthood by Peter, James and John, the three Apostles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And although he turned away from the Church, he never failed, to the day of his death, to bear witness of these things.

An incident recently came to my notice through Elder C. M. Nielsen of this city. Brother Nielsen was on a mission in the Eastern States. After trying in vain at several places to secure entertainment, he asked a man who was just stepping into his wagon, to take him for a ride. The man turned around and asked him a number of questions. Finally he asked him where he was from, and he told him he was from Utah, and that he was a Mormon. The man invited him to get into his wagon and go home with him. When he got home the man related the following incident in the life of Oliver Cowdery, after he had left the Church: This man one day was at the county seat (as I remember, it was Springfield, Illinois), and there was a trial for murder going on. He dropped in just as the attorney for the defense was making his plea. This attorney, instead of defending the prisoner, took it upon himself to ridicule the county prosecuting attorney, who was none other than Oliver Cowdery. He asked Oliver Cowdery to tell the jury what he knew about the "Mormon Bible," about the "golden plates," about "old Joe Smith," and about the lie he had signed his name to regarding the divinity of the Book of Mormon. After the attorney had finished, Oliver Cowdery arose, and in the presence of the court and the assembled multitude (the courthouse being full) he declared in the most solemn manner that every word written in this testimony to the divinity of the Book of Mormon was true. He declared that upon his head Peter, James and John, the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, had laid their hands, and he had received from them the Melchisedek Priesthood; that upon his head John the Baptist also had laid his hands and ordained him to the Aaronic Priesthood. Said he, "I bear witness before the court and the assembled multitude that the only reason that I to-day am not in Utah with the body of the people called Mormons is because I have committed sin, and I have fallen by the wayside; but the one ambition of my life is that I may before I die regain my standing in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." This man testified to Elder Nielsen that that testimony had made such a vivid impression upon his mind although it had been some twenty or thirty years before, that he had never been able to get away from it, and from that day until the day he met Elder Nielsen he had desired to meet a Mormon Elder. He expressed delight at meeting Elder Nielsen, and he entertained him; and the result was that this man and all his family embraced the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Oliver Cowdery himself bears testimony in the following language with reference to his receiving the Aaronic Priesthood:

"These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! [This was when he was acting as scribe for the Prophet Joseph]. Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated with the Urim and Thummim, or, as the Nephites would have said, 'Interpreters,' the history or record called 'The Book of Mormon.'

"To notice, in even few words, the interesting account given by Mormon and his faithful son Moroni, of a people once beloved and favored of heaven, would supercede my present design; I shall therefore defer this to a future period, and as I said in the introduction, pass more directly to some few incidents immediately connected with the rise of this Church, which may be entertaining to some thousands who have stepped forward amid the frowns of bigots and the calumny of hypocrites, and embraced the Gospel of Christ.

"No men, in their sober senses, could translate and write the directions given to the Nephites from the mouth of the Savior, of the precise manner in which men should build up His Church, and especially when corruption had spread an uncertainty over all forms and systems practiced among men, without desiring a privilege of showing the willingness of the heart by being buried in the liquid grave, to answer a 'good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.'

"After writing the account given of the Savior's ministry to the remnant of the seed of Jacob, upon this continent, it was easily to be seen, as the Prophet said would be, that darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the minds of the people. On reflecting further it was easily to be seen, that amid the great strife and noise concerning religion, none had authority from God to administer the ordinances of the Gospel. For the question might be asked, Have men authority to administer in the name of Christ who deny revelations, when His testimony is no less than the Spirit of Prophecy, and His religion based, built and sustained by immediate revelations in all ages of the world, when He has had a people on earth? If these facts were buried, and carefully concealed by men whose craft would have been in danger if once permitted to shine in the faces of men, they were no longer to us: and we only waited for the commandment to be given, 'Arise and be baptized.'

"This was not long desired before it was realized. The Lord, who is rich in mercy, and ever willing to answer the consistent prayer of the humble, after we had called upon Him in a fervent manner, aside from the abodes of men, condescended to manifest to us His will. On a sudden, as from the midst of eternity, the voice of the Redeemer spake peace to us, while the vail was parted and the angel of God came down clothed with glory, and delivered the anxiously looked for message, and the keys of the Gospel of repentance! What joy! what wonder! what amazement! While the world was racked and distracted—while millions were groping as the blind for the wall, and while all men were resting upon uncertainty, as a general mass, our eyes beheld, our ears heard. As in the 'blaze of day,' yes more—above the glitter of the May sunbeam, which then shed its brilliancy over the face of nature! Then his voice, though mild, pierced to the center, and his words, 'I am thy fellow-servant,' dispelled every fear. We listened, we gazed, we admired! 'Twas the voice of an angel from glory, 'twas a message from the Most High! And as we heard we rejoiced, while His love enkindled upon our souls, and we were wrapt in the vision of the Almighty! Where was room for doubt? No—where; uncertainty had fled, doubt had sunk no more to rise, while fiction and deception had fled forever!

"But, dear brother, think, further think for a moment what joy fille our hearts, and with what surprise we must have bowed (for who would not have bowed the knee for such a blessing?) when we received under his hand the holy Priesthood as he said, 'Upon you my fellow-servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer this Priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon earth, that the sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.'

"I shall not attempt to paint to you the feelings of this heart, nor the majestic beauty and glory which surrounded us on this occasion; but you will believe me when I say, that earth, nor men, with the eloquence of time, cannot begin to clothe language in as interesting and sublime a manner as this holy personage. No; nor has this earth power to give the joy, to bestow the peace, or comprehend the wisdom which was contained in each sentence as they were delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit! Man may deceive his fellowman, deception may follow deception, and the children of the wicked one may have power to seduce the foolish and untaught, till naught but fiction feeds the many, and the fruit of falsehood carries in its current the giddy to the grave; but one touch with the finger of his love, yes, one ray of glory from the upper world, or one word from the mouth of the Savior, from the bosom of eternity, strikes it all into insignificance, and blots it forever from the mind! The assurance that we were in the presence of an angel; yes, one ray of glory. The certainty that we heard the voice of Jesus, and the truth unallied as it flowed from a pure personage, dictated by the will of God, is to me past description, and I shall ever look upon this expression of the Savior's goodness with wonder and thanksgiving while I am permitted to tarry; and in those mansions where perfection dwells and sin never comes, I hope to adore in that day which shall never cease!"

I find that it is wearying me to speak, and that it would not be wisdom in me to continue my remarks in the line I have started and as they are mapped out in my mind. But I rejoice that this man, Oliver Cowdery, did receive baptism and died a member of the Church. I rejoice in the gifts and the graces of the Gospel. I rejoice in knowing that the promises of God are true and faithful to those who believe. I do know that the gift of tongues exists among the Latter-day Saints. I do know that God hears and answers the prayers of those who lay their hands upon the sick, many of whom are given up to die by the doctors. I know that God healed my children when they were afflicted in Washington, through the faith and prayers of the Priesthood. I know, notwithstanding a spiritual medium told the lady in the house where I was stopping that she saw one of my daughters die, that by the power and authority of the Priesthood of God my little girl was raised up from her bed of affliction, and she is in the valleys of the mountains to-day enjoying good health. I know that in the hour of affliction God hears and answers our prayers and comforts our hearts. I have been through these things. I knew as well before I went to the hospital that I would return as I know it to-day. I knew by the inspiration of the Spirit of God to me that I should recover. I bear testimony to you that God lives, and I know it. I bear testimony to you that Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer of the world. I bear testimony to you that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God. I pray that God may lead us one and all by the light and inspiration of His Spirit, and I ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen.