



Type: General Conference

Untitled Talk (6 October 1925)

Author(s): B.H. Roberts

Source: *The Ninety-Sixth Semi-Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

Published: Salt Lake City; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,
1925

Page(s): 143-150

Abstract: Answers the question that a little boy asked, “Why are people?” It cannot be answered in the Old or in the New Testament The Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 2:24-25) teaches the purpose of God in the creation.

the great character of old, taught his people in his time that those who thought they could do a little here and a little there, telling a lie here and a lie there, or steal a little today and steal a little tomorrow, that they could forget the Lord today and remember him tomorrow, procrastinate and put off, that they would be deceived in the end, that the adversary who was lying in wait to destroy the faith of the people then, that adversary still lives and is still in wait to take advantage of the follies of the people, and to place barriers in their pathway. But I want to promise you, my brethren and sisters, that though he is alive and in waiting for the weaknesses and follies of the people, that if you will observe the teachings of your faithful parents, that if you will observe the teachings of the elders in Israel, if you will observe the laws of nature and the words of wisdom, as they have been taught unto you from the beginning of this Church, since they were revealed to us, that the God of heaven will give you power every day of your lives to defend yourselves, that you may keep yourselves worthy of the blessings that the Lord has in store for you, and that you will have power to triumph over these barriers, to live and enjoy this happy, wonderful testimony that God lives, that he is the giver of life, that he forgives sins, that he gives you power to overcome weaknesses, that he will spare your lives in usefulness, that he will bless the labor of your hands temporally and spiritually, that he will give you understanding through the quickening of your minds and your desires and your ability to see and to understand. I have faith that the God of heaven will hear your prayers and answer you, he will remember you in mercy and bless you beyond your power to appreciate your blessings.

I desire to express my appreciation for the blessings that the Lord has granted unto me, for my faith in and my knowledge of God and his works, for I know that God lives, that he does hear and answer prayers, that he does forgive sins unto those who honestly repent of their sins, forsake them and live in obedience to the teachings of Christ.

I pray God to bless the officers and members of the Church throughout its entire organization. May faith, knowledge and obedience increase among the people to the glory of the Lord and his work, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

A duet, "Hail to the brightness of Zion's glad morning," by J. R. Boshard and Mrs. Hugh Peterson, was sung.

ELDER BRIGHAM H. ROBERTS

*Of the First Council of Seventy and President of the
Eastern States Mission*

I thank God for music, and for these gifted sons and daughters of God who vocally and on instruments can produce it. If I.

could only preach the gospel as these gifted sons and daughters of God sing it, and could produce in the souls of men the thrills that come to me when the truth is set to music, and artistically rendered, I would ask no other wealth or gift from God.

When the sessions of our conference closed on Sunday afternoon I felt that if nothing more should be added, this conference would go down in history as of great importance, because of the treatment that had been already given upon great and fundamental principles, principles of highest importance, and especially at this present time, and in view of the waves of religious thought and irreligious thought that are sweeping over our nation, and I presume over other nations also. But when I stand before you to make my own very humble contribution to this historic conference, it is with a great deal of misgiving, and I approach that brief and humble task with much trepidation.

On my way home from the Eastern States I bought some magazines with which to while away the tedium of the journey, and in one of them I was attracted by this title: **"It Is a Wise Father Who Can Answer His Own Child."**

In the course of setting forth that thought the father who wrote the article describes how a son about eight years of age said to him one day:

"Daddy, why are people?" The father felt that "an armful" had been handed him, according to his own confession. So he stalled a little and replied to his son that that was a question that had been debated some five or ten thousand years, and it was not quite certain yet that anybody had found the right answer.

"Well," said the boy, "that's funny." Then, after a silence he said again: "Daddy, don't you think that is funny?" The father again stalled and he said: "Well, it is just possible that if we knew everything, life would not be so very interesting." "Well," persisted the boy, "I think it is funny. Now I have to go out and play ball the rest of the afternoon, and if you find out anything I would like to hear it at dinner."

Now of course that may be a strange way of presenting a great theme. It has been much thought of, and the question put in a more worthy form. I think perhaps the poet-prophet of Israel, King David, stated the question in a manner much more worthy, and I call your attention to it. It is very familiar to you, but I am sure it is worthy of your further consideration:

"Oh, Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hast set thy glory above the heavens. . . .

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

"For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.

“Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:

“All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;

“The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

“O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!”

David here asks some very important questions. He does not answer them, however, either in this psalm nor in any subsequent one. St. Paul quotes this passage from David in his letter to the Hebrews, but he does not answer the questions. This passage brings up the question of the purposes of God in the creation; but these two prophets, David and Paul, do not give answers to the questions they ask. None of the philosophers outside of those cults that have been recognized as founded upon revelation from God have ever answered these questions in any authoritative way. It may seem like a bold statement, but it is true, nevertheless, that there is no answer contained in the Old Testament to these questions. In all the revelations that are given in the Old Testament there is no declaration made of the purposes of God in the creation. I am going to ask you to go one step further, and to bear with me while I say to you that neither in the New Testament is there any adequate declaration that satisfies the inquiring mind upon that subject. The only scripture that comes anywhere nearly touching it is found in the following:

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” (Rev. 4:11.)

That is the nearest, either in the Old or in the New Testament, in all that is written—the nearest approach to an explanation of the purpose of God in the creation. I think you will agree with me that that is not very satisfactory to you or to me or to mankind in general. God has created all things and for his pleasure they are and were created. All right, but where do we come in? And what explanation is that to us of the purposes of God in our creation?

I call your attention to the fact that this father to whom the lad propounded his question, confessed that he had been “handed an armful.” He did not, however, regard the question of his boy as “silly.” “On the contrary,” said he, “it is so fundamental that it quite bowls one over.” And then he adds this thoughtful remark:

“Think what it would mean to the human race to have an answer that every one of us would accept. That I should say would be quite a neat little achievement;” that is to give an intelligent, acceptable, and, I will add, an authoritative answer to the question, “Why are people?” Or in other words, what is the purpose of God in the creation of man? I have rather boldly said that you can find no answer in the Old Testament nor in the New Testament.

But now I will ask you to follow me for a few moments in some suppositions I am going to make.

Suppose that in some catacomb in Egypt, or some musty tomb of ancient prophets, a fragment of parchment could be found that could be well established as containing the very words of the great prophet Moses; and suppose that fragment should contain this statement:

“THIS IS MY WORK AND MY GLORY, SAITH THE LORD, TO BRING TO PASS THE IMMORTALITY AND ETERNAL LIFE OF MAN.”

What would be the result upon the thought of the world if by human means such a fragment of parchment could be brought forth and established as undoubtedly the utterance of the great prophet of Israel, Moses? It would be regarded, I warrant you, as the most valuable utterance that had occurred among men. Aye, its value would be greater in giving enlightenment to men as to the purposes of God in the creation of man, than all else that is written in the Bible; and as a discovery it would be as important as the discovery of the original tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments would be.

Again I will ask you to suppose that under similar circumstances and by human means, another literary discovery was made that should read as follows—this is a second fragment that we will suppose has been discovered:

“Man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy. And when separated, man cannot receive a fulness of joy.” * * *

“The elements are the tabernacle of God; yea, man is the tabernacle of God, even temples; and whatsoever temple is defiled, God shall destroy that temple.

“The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.”

That is to say, the light by which truth is discerned. I would like to make this addition to the foregoing quotation. It does not occur in this same passage, but I would like to make this addition to this scrap of supposed parchment, and have it included in our whole supposition:

“The body and the spirit is the soul of man, and the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul.”

Now let us add these statements together in these supposed parchment fragments, then put the two together—the one from Moses and this passage just quoted. We would then have:

“This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. . . .

“The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy. . . .

“The spirit and the body is the soul of man; the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul.”

Now I begin to see forming a marvelous, a splendid, a worthy conclusion, out of these discovered fragments—the purpose of God in the creation of man. It is the purpose of God to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man, because a union of spirit and element is essential to the fulness of man's joy. That immortality and eternal life is brought to pass by the indissoluble union of the body and the spirit of man, by which he becomes soul—one, united, inseparable, an entity indestructible, and put in the way of attainment of a fulness of joy. But the end is not yet.

I will ask you to suppose the discovery of another fragment of manuscript from ruined temple, from catacomb or from musty tomb, and yet its antiquity and its authenticity as going back to an inspired man of God—a prophet—may not be questioned. We will suppose this third discovered, sacred parchment should say this—I will ask you to mark the beauty of it:

“All things have been done in the wisdom of Him who knoweth all things.”

Now that has in it the music of inspired poetry, to me. It also has a depth of philosophy that is quite wonderful.

“All things have been done in the wisdom of Him who knoweth all things.”

Perfect wisdom can come only from perfect knowledge, and here you have the two combined,—perfect wisdom rising from perfect knowledge; all things ordained for the earth and the inhabitants thereof have been wrought in the highest wisdom, according to the declaration of this third discovered fragment we are supposing. And then the rest of the fragment must be read to get the full import of its meaning. I will read the two beautiful lines I have in mind together:

“All things have been done in the wisdom of Him who knoweth all things:

“Adam fell that man might be. Men are that they might have joy.”

And thus these fragments of truth—we will say for the moment from ancient parchment just discovered—have enlightened the world on this great theme as no other utterances have ever enlightened the children of men. If they could only be discovered in the way we have supposed, it seems to me that there would rise up from all the hosts of men peans of praise to Almighty God, for this great light shed abroad upon the minds of men with reference to the purposes of God in the creation; and especially as to the creation of man.

Now we will drop the suppositions assumed. These three great utterances constitute the message of “Mormonism” to the world upon this great theme. The first comes from a fragment of the teachings of the prophet Moses, found not in musty tomb or ruined temple, but revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith before this Church of ours was six months old. The second comes from a

revelation from God to him, in the year 1833. The third contribution comes from our Book of Mormon, and is the contribution of sleeping nations once inhabiting the American continents, a message through their prophet leader to the modern world, and a contribution to the modern world for its enlightenment. How splendid all that is!

We are not quite through, however, with this magazine lad's questions yet; nor with David's sublime questions. We have learned a little about the purpose of God in the creation, but the other part of the question still remains: What is man that God is mindful of him? Or the son of man, that he visits him, and gives him dominion over his works?

Only just a moment can be devoted to the great theme. I quote the words of the Christ in that last prayer of his in Gethsemane:

"Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee."

I quote that scripture because without any equivocation it declares by the lips of the Christ himself the fact that he is the Son of God; and now he says:

"Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Here the Christ proclaims both the pre-existence of his own spirit and the glory he had with his Father before he came to the earth. These doctrines used to puzzle those among whom he moved when in his earth life. In controversy with the Pharisees on one occasion, when they were boasting about Abraham being their father, he said:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad." "Oh," said they, "you are not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" And he answered, "Before Abraham was, I am."

Reference was made by President Ivins on Sunday to that most marvelous of all revelations on the pre-existence of the spirit of the Christ given to Moriancumer, the brother of Jared. So complete was that vision, so certain it was, that the Prophets as he beheld the finger of the Lord stretched forth, exclaimed: "I knew not that the Lord had flesh and blood." This view was corrected by the Lord, who said:

"This is the body of my spirit, and as I appear unto you in the spirit, so will I appear unto my people in the flesh." In other words, it was the spirit form of the Christ which Moriancumer beheld. It is the spirit that gives form to the whole man. The spirit out of the elements in this earth-life clothes itself with this beautiful garment, the human body, which in the providences of God shall be made immortal. This through the processes, first of birth into mortality—earth life; and after that, birth into immortality through the resurrection. Through these processes shall come forth those personages that shall be eternal—a union of spirit and

element that shall be indissoluble. The mortal state is but a prelude to that immortal life, and to that "eternal life" which shall include with it an eternal union with God, a union that shall lead to the eternal progress and development of the divine intelligences that inhabit these bodies.

Now, Jesus Christ is the Son of God. All right, what is our relationship to him? He met Mary early in the morning of the resurrection, and when she would approach him and place her hands upon him in loving affection, he said:

"Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father." It seems he was reserving contact with his resurrected, immortal body, for the first embrace of the Father. "Touch me not, but go and tell my brethren," referring to the apostles,—“tell my brethren, that I ascend unto my Father, and to your Father, to my God, and to your God.”

I know of no other scripture that so beautifully sets forth the relationship of brotherhood of man to the Christ than this passage; unless perhaps it might be this one:

"For both he that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." Showing that our origin is the same as the origin of the Christ. Now I understand Paul clearly when he says:

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

Now ask the question, David; "What is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" The answer is: Sons of God, brothers to the Christ, sparks struck from God's own eternal blaze—parts of him—parts of God! Hence, God is mindful of man; hence he visits them, hence he places all things under their feet, and gives them the high mission to multiply and replenish the inhabitants of the earth, and to have dominion over it.

How blessed this doctrine! How high and lifted up it is above the notion that man has his origin in the slime of the ocean, and the protoplasm which rises from it, until it differentiates into the various forms of life, and man comes from some one or other of the many lines that lead out from this common source of life!

I have been thrilled in this conference by reference to that vision that the Lord gave to Abraham of the intelligences that were organized before the world itself was formed. In the great host before the throne of God there were many noble and great ones—noble and great ones! And God looked upon these spirits, "and they were good;" and he said to Abraham: "These I will make my rulers. Thou, Abraham, art one of them." I pray you note the characterization of these prominent spirits—"noble," "great," "good"! These are characteristics that embrace all other virtues. They include everything that could be desired in the way of character elements. How splendid that is! Of course we common

men, doubtless stand far below that high level on which God placed these "noble" ones, and "great" ones, and "good," in the vision he gave to one of the noblest—Abraham. But how comforting it is, and how blest it must be to have the assurance that though far below, in excellence, these whom God has selected to be his rulers, we nevertheless are brothers to them; and in lesser degree possessing that which they possess, with the opportunity and privilege granted to us to approach if we may not attain to their excellence. Then to be brothers to him—brothers to the Christ; and brothers to that worthy host that has been chosen to be associated with the Christ in leadership of those things which make for the accomplishment of God's purposes with reference to the existence of man in the earth. That affords me much more comfort than to think of man as being related—even though distantly related—to the brute creation.

I close with this scripture:

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; * * * and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." That is, we cannot estimate the possibilities growing out of that truth, and that relationship—"it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard the depth and height of the glory which God designs for his children. We may not fathom it upward or downward, "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (I. John 3:1-3.) God grant that it may be so, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

ELDER LEVI EDGAR YOUNG

Of the First Council of Seventy

I, too, sincerely pray that the Spirit of the Lord may be with me in the very few minutes that I speak. My heart, my spirit, my mind, have been raised to praise for the power of the Almighty God, and for gratitude that I am called to be one of his servants.

This conference has been impressive for the fact that our faith in God, more and more, has been expressed by every speaker; and not that I could carry on the great thought that has been expressed the last few moments to the end that we might be raised to still greater faith, but let me please add the thought that has impressed me during the morning session of this conference; namely, that in all history, in the story of the development of God's children to the present moment, we find that they who have had faith in him as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, they, the races, the peoples, the nations, the individuals who have been converted to the ways of Christ, and have been able to raise their voices in expression of the living faith in Christ,—those people and nations have