

SERMON BY PRESIDENT W. W. BLAIR,

At Lamoni, Iowa, November 27, 1892.

Subject, A MARVELOUS WORK AND A WONDER.

I WILL read a portion of Holy Writ that is a promise and prophecy concerning an extraordinary work—a work that God decreed to establish and carry forward in these latter days. I do not expect to exhaust the subject that stands revealed in the chapter, but to simply present some of its salient points and bring from other portions of Scripture, as also from history, evidences that the work that is here described has been begun, and that it is being carried forward, all in fulfillment of this word of prophecy. I commence at the ninth verse of the twenty-ninth chapter of Isaiah: “Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. [They have partaken of the cup of Mystery Babylon. For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered.” You will notice that it is a peculiar work that is in contemplation; it is of a religious, spiritual character, and not matters that appertain to mere moral and scientific questions, nor the affairs of civil government.

“And the vision of all [that is of these seers, and rulers, and prophets] is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: and the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I am not learned. Wherefore the Lord said [here comes the promise], Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward

me is taught by the precept of men: therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. [Mark you, this relates to matters of religion; that is, it appertains to the government of God. These wise and prudent are the professedly wise teachers of religion.] Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay [you see by this that religious matters are then wrong side up; are in a confused state]: for shall the work say of him that made it, He make me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding? Is it not yet a very little while [that is, a little while after God commences this marvelous work and a wonder], and Lebanon [Palestine] shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest? And in that day [when God turns Lebanon into a fruitful field] shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall *increase* their joy in the Lord [and why? Manifestly for the reason that God just then has set his hand to do this marvelous work and a wonder], and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. [They rejoice because they receive the “marvelous work and a wonder” that the Holy One of Israel hath established]. For the terrible one is brought

to naught, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off: that make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of naught. Therefore thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. [That is, when God commences this work. Paleness is a sign of fear, distress, and want, etc.] But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel."

Another important matter will take place when God establishes this marvelous work and a wonder, and that is, "They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine."

Now, this that we have read is contemplated as part and parcel of the marvelous work and a wonder that God has to introduce in the times here indicated, when the wisdom of the wise men shall perish and the understanding of the prudent shall be hid. Manifestly the wisdom of the wise men, in matters of religion will be brought to naught. I have read this chapter and made these explanations that you may see the scope, at least in the outlining, of what we propose by the blessing of God to present to you in our endeavor to prove that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is not a man-made church, but that it was founded in the wisdom of God, and by the power of God; to be conducted onward and upward until its final consummation.

In the first sermon delivered in this series we took into consideration the *need* of a restoration of the gospel dispensation from the fact that the world was and is divided—the Christian world is hopelessly divided—in regard to the

work and mission of Christianity, also in relation to the doctrine and ordinances of the church, in church government and in spiritual affairs generally; and that there were and are irreconcilable differences made by these divisions and subdivisions in the so-called Christian Church; hence, in the very nature of things, there is a *necessity* that God should remove the causes for further differences by re-establishing his church after its ancient order and pattern and send the true gospel of God's dear Son to be preached in power to the sons of men.

It is declared in Holy Writ that there would be a re-establishment of God's church and kingdom in the latter days. The Bible contains evidences unmistakable that there would be, after the days of Jesus and the apostles, a fearful apostasy, one in which the entire church would be involved. They would "turn away their ears from the truth" and "be turned unto fables; that the people under that apostasy would "heap to themselves teachers"—that is to say, they would have teachers after their own tastes and ideas, and in harmony with their own theories, preaching doctrines acceptable to them; they would be man-made instead of divinely called preachers. That is just what is contemplated in the prophecy of Paul in 2 Timothy, chapter 4, where he says, "They shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." A fable is a fiction, and has but a semblance of truth in it.

This forenoon we heard from President Smith that the Latter Day Saints had equally as good right to organize a church, build it up, and call it the Christian Church as any other people upon the face of the earth, so far as the authority of man is concerned. He referred back to the Reformation, how it began in its earliest days; pointed to the days of Luther and Melancthon, who having dis-

covered the corruptions in the Mother Church, claimed the right to withdraw from that body, and, as far as man is concerned, claimed to organize a religious system, and denominate it the Church of Christ; and that after that came the Church of England, founded and organized under Henry VIII. one of the vilest kings that ever cursed England, aided by Cardinal Wolsey and others, the inspiring cause of the occasion being the fact that the Pope of Rome would not grant to the king the privilege of divorcing his wife and marrying Anne Boleyn! It was also shown by President Smith that men had stepped out from the old beaten paths, assumed that they had more light and were thereby authorized to build up better systems than that from which they passed, hence one church organization after another had been established until we come down to this nineteenth century when Thomas Campbell, and afterwards his son, Alexander, and others, organized the Disciples Church, drawing nearer to the original Christian standard, upon some points, than any of the reformers that had preceded them, and that these all originated in the wisdom of man and without any special, direct call from God. Now, if the Bible be true,—and we assume that it is,—when God commences *his* work in the latter days he will do it in the way that has been foretold by the prophets. The people to whom that work comes will build it up by intelligent faith in God; the work will be established and carried forward by direct revelation from God to those who shall be called as his servants to carry onward and forward the building up of the Church of Christ. Now understand me, brethren, and sisters, and friends, we claim that this is Bible-made philosophy; that God, in order to act consistently with himself, when he performs this marvelous work and a wonder will proceed to do it directly, and that there will be individuals to whom that work is committed who will know

by the revelations of God to them that that work is divine.

We will have already seen that in this prophecy from which we have read the Lord says, “I will proceed to do a marvelous work and a wonder;” and the reason for his doing this he says is, “Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me [formality predominant you discover], but their heart is removed far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of man: therefore [for this reason, saith the Lord], behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people.” You may expect therefore that we to-night shall advocate something of a marvelous character, for the work is to be a marvelous work, a wonderful work. It is to be a work that comes right in conflict with the wisdom of the wise and the understanding of the prudent in matters of religion. We should expect therefore that when this work of God comes forth it will not harmonize with the theories of the wise and prudent in matters of religion and service toward God. You may rest assured that we will present to you some things that are extraordinary, some things that are marvelous and entirely out of the order of things prevailing for the last sixteen hundred years at least.

The claims that we shall now present in evidence of this latter-day work we receive from the pen of Joseph Smith, the Seer, and some who are not conversant with Holy Writ may be startled when they see the marvelous and wonderful claims contained in the history of this man, Joseph Smith. We heard to-day how his heart was troubled and moved on the subject of religion, and distressed over the divided condition of the religious sects he was then acquainted with, and that he did not know which one to unite with. He was in doubt as to what he should do in the premises, and he finally read in James where it says, “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." This he says, entered his soul with such power that he was conscious it was true, and he prayed to God and received an answer. He says that the Lord was as good as his word, for there was opened before him by the Holy Spirit a vision of glory in which he received wisdom and instruction, and he had revealed to him many of the purposes of God in regard to these latter times, that the time was near when the Lord would commence his marvelous work and a wonder. He was then a boy of about fifteen years of age; this was in 1820. In 1823 he had another vision, which was frequently repeated until 1827, when he had the golden plates given to him from which this Book of Mormon was translated, in fulfillment of this prophecy of Isaiah where it says that "the vision" of the "seers" and "rulers" and "prophets" were "covered," etc. I will now read you something of this history, and you can prepare your minds for something very extraordinary, very marvelous, very wonderful, in fulfillment of the prophetic description contained in what we have heretofore read. He says: "While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James first chapter, and fifth verse, which reads, If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

"Never did any passage of Scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects

understood the same passage so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible. At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. I at length came to the determination to 'ask of God,' concluding that if he gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture. So, in accordance with this, my determination to ask of God, I retired to the woods to make the attempt. It was on the morning of a beautiful clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty. It was the first time in my life that I had made such an attempt, for amidst all my anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally. After I had retired into the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. [Here satanic power was manifested in order to try to prevent the manifestation of divine power.] Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction. But exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but from the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such a marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun which descended gradually

until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name, and said, pointing to the other, 'This is my beloved Son, hear him.'

"My object in going to enquire of the Lord, was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right, for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong, and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight: that those professors were all corrupt. [He did not say that the people themselves were an abomination in his sight, but that "their creeds were an abomination," and then quoted this passage which we have before read]; "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrine, the commandments of men; having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof." He again forbade me to join with any of them: and many other things did he say unto me which I cannot write at this time.

"When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. Some few days after I had this vision, I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist preachers, who was very active in the before-mentioned religious excitement, and conversing with him on the subject of religion, I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my

communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the Devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there never would be any more of them. I soon found, however, that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase, and though I was an obscure boy, only between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a hot persecution; and this was common among all the sects; all united to persecute me.

"It caused me serious reflection then, and often has since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, so as to create in them a spirit of the hottest persecution and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and was often the cause of great sorrow to myself. However, it was nevertheless a fact that I had had a vision. I have thought since, that I felt much like Paul when he made his defense before King Agrippa and related the account of the vision he had when he 'saw a light and heard a voice.' But still there were but few who believed him; some said that he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed and reviled; but all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise; and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he

knew, and would know unto his latest breath, that he had both seen a light, and heard a voice speaking to him, and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise. So it was with me: I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two personages, and they did in reality speak unto me, or one of them did; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart, Why persecute for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision, and 'who am I that I can withstand God?' or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision: I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dare I do it; at least I knew by so doing I would offend God and come under condemnation."

You discover that here is a marvelous claim, the claim that God and his Christ had appeared to that boy when his heart was deeply moved upon the subject of religion, and that the Lord gave him to understand the situation of affairs in the religious world at large and told him what we find in this chapter, that people at that time drew near to the Lord with their lips while their heart was far removed from him, and their fear toward him was taught by the wisdom of men. I can remember when they used to preach judgments in a manner that would make your hair stand on end. I used to hear it when going with my parents to church, and I have heard it taught since until I became disgusted and became an infidel. They taught the precepts of men, not the precepts of the Lord. They would detail the horrors of a liquid hell and the intensity of suffering the wicked would there have to undergo throughout the endless ages to come, something they could not find in the Bible, and it was by

the precepts of men that they taught this.

This Bible declares that God would commence this work in the latter days—"I will proceed to do a marvelous work, even a marvelous work and a wonder." Joseph's claims in this respect are sustained by the word of God. He claims that God *did* set his hand, directing him by a divine manifestation; and the Scriptures declare that God would do such a work in this age of the world.

Joseph relates that being of tender years, and having been severely persecuted, and surrounded with unfavorable conditions, he fell into habits and customs that were displeasing in the sight of God, and that he often felt condemned for such weakness and imperfections, and he then says: "On the evening of the . . . 21st of September, 1823, after I had retired to bed for the night, I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me that I might know of my state and standing before him; for I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I had previously had one. While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in the room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noon-day, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor. He had on a loose robe of exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant. His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above the wrists: so, also, were his feet naked, as were his legs a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open so that I could see into his bosom. Not only was his robe

exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him I was afraid; but the fear soon left me. He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Nephi [it should be Moroni; this is a misprint]; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be good and evil spoken of among all people. [What a promise to a boy that was only eighteen years of age, or less, that so prominent would he become in the world, that his name would go out among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, and that it should be had both for evil and for good! How truly that has been fulfilled! What a promise to be made to a lad, an unlettered lad, reared in obscurity! How wondrously it has been fulfilled and is being fulfilled!] He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent [continent of America], and the source whence they sprang."

Is not this the book described in the 29th chapter of Isaiah, the words of which were delivered to one that is learned for him to read, but he could not? And then the book was to be given to him that was not learned to read, and he says, "I am not learned." "In that day," it is promised, the deaf were to "hear the words" of this book; and now comes this young man, Joseph Smith, who says that the angel declared unto him the existence of that book.

Let us see further concerning Joseph's claims: "He also said that the fullness of the everlasting gospel was contained in it [this book], as delivered by the Savior to the ancient [American] inhabit-

ants; also that there were two stones in silver bows, and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim, deposited with the plates, and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted seers in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book."

He said to this young man, Joseph Smith, that this book of plates contained matters relating to the people that once inhabited this continent, America. That was at a time when little was known concerning the ancient inhabitants of America. Since 1838 there has been a flood of light thrown upon this subject by the various researches made by antiquarians and travelers in Central America, the northern part of South America, and the southern part of North America, which has revealed the fact that peoples who once dwelt upon this continent were equally skilled in the arts and sciences of civilized life as those who builded the splendid empires of Egypt, of Chaldea, and other ancient nations we read about in history. And these discoveries have been made known to the reading public chiefly since the coming forth of this book.

Another point we here notice; he said that "the fullness of the everlasting gospel was contained in the book. Now it should not be thought strange that God would have his gospel preached in this western hemisphere to these nations that builded these splendid civilizations, the remains of which we find in the antiquities of America. It is not at all strange, when we consider that God is no respecter of persons and that he "made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell upon all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him." —Acts 17:26, 27. It is not at all strange

that God should establish the gospel anciently in this western hemisphere. When we contemplate this matter we must see the probability of it; we must see that if God is just and equitable, that he would deal by ancient peoples on these western continents as he dealt with those upon the eastern continents. And it is not at all strange that, in the revelation of this wonderful latter-day work we should find that when God brought forth this wonderful book of Isaiah 29: 11-18, it should contain the fullness of the gospel of God's dear Son; and that is just what the Book of Mormon claims to contain.

Joseph says further:—

"After telling me these things, he commenced quoting the prophecies of the Old Testament."

By this you discover that even the angels know the Scriptures, and quote them; a good precedent for us to follow.

Joseph further says:—

"He first quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi, and he quoted the fourth or last chapter of the same prophecy, though with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bible. Instead of quoting the first verse as it reads in our books, he quoted it thus: For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall burn as stubble; for they that come shall burn them, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."

Please notice this teaching of Jesus Christ in Matthew 13: 41, 42: "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Now you see that the statement made by the angel to Joseph harmonizes with the teachings of Jesus Christ in Matthew.

Let us read the history further: "And

again he quoted the fifth verse thus, 'Behold, I will reveal unto you the priesthood by the hand of Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.' Joseph and Oliver declare that John the Baptist revealed unto them the priesthood in these latter times. It was John the Baptist who, laying one hand upon the head of Joseph Smith, and the other upon the head of Oliver Cowdery, said, 'Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion, for the remission of sins, and this shall never be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.'

Joseph continues: "He also quoted the next verse differently: 'And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers; if it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming. In addition to these, he quoted the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, saying that it was about to be fulfilled. He quoted also the third chapter of Acts, twenty-second and twenty-third verses, precisely as they stand in our New Testament. He said that that prophet was Christ, but the day had not yet come, when 'they who would not hear his voice, should be cut off from among the people,' but soon would come. He also quoted the second chapter of Joel, from the twenty-eighth verse to the last. He also said that this was not yet fulfilled, but was soon to be. [This is where it says, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions, and wonders shall be seen in the heavens and in the earth," etc.]—*Reported by Bro. E. Stafford.*

(Concluded in next Supplement.)