

SERMON BY ELDER JOHN H. LAKE,

At Lamoni, Iowa, April 1, 1894.

Subject, UNDERSTANDING THE ALMIGHTY.

IN the twenty-first chapter and the fifteenth verse of the Book of Job is a text of Scripture that I wish to select for the basis of the remarks that I shall offer. It reads:—

“What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?”

From the casual reading of this text it may be thought that Job propounded this question; because he was at a loss to know who the Almighty was. But by more careful reading we learn that it is a question of sarcasm—mockery—a derisive question, propounded by them that disbelieved in the God that Job was representing and had borne testimony of. We read, to elucidate that thought, commencing at the first of the chapter:—

“But Job answered and said, Hear diligently my speech, and let this be your consolations. Suffer me that I may speak; and after that I have spoken, mock on.”

They had been mocking, making derision of the God that Job had represented to the people where he dwelt. Further, he states:—

“Mark me, and be astonished, and lay your hand upon your mouth.” As much as to say, that a man should not speak unless he knew whereof he was speaking; and the God that Job had represented among that people he knew; and that the persons that were in his presence speaking slightly of him did not know whereof they spoke; and it was more becoming of them to put their hand upon their mouth than in a derisive manner to continue their speech concerning the God that Job had spoken of. He had testified to that people that there was a spirit in man,

and that the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. He also had testified of his Redeemer, that he knew that he lived, and though after he would pass away, the skin worms destroy his mortal body, yet in his flesh should he see God. And the people who had heard these testimonies did not appreciate, nor consider, nor realize, nor understand the nature of them. They looked upon it from a human standpoint, perhaps being governed more or less by the gods that they worshiped, which were dumb, and unable to bring about the powers of the God Job represented. And from their standpoint they entered into the presence of Job and propounded the question, “Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?”

So far as I have been informed, no part, nor portion, nor any nation of the world, that has ever yet been found, has ever been found without a god. They all have gods to worship. Some worship the sun, and some worship images. They all have a god to reverence. It is one of the traits of character, it is one of the functions of our being to reverence and to worship. And the question propounded to Job is, “Who is this Almighty, that we should serve him?” Job had represented the God that had created the earth, the God of the living and the God of the dead, and the God that possesses all power. If a man in his wisdom can comprehend this testimony of Job, and the question propounded, he is surrounded with corroborative testimony in the Scriptures, and as the poet Cowper has described in that memorable hymn, the verse that contains the idea that I wish

to bring before the vision of your understandings is that wherein he says:—

“Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan his works in vain.
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.”

So the question here propounded by Job must be answered not only by Job, but all must have corroborating testimonies who this God, the Almighty is, and how, upon what conditions man is required to worship him. The Scriptures revealing the condition of the human family, and their understanding of God, tell us that the world, in their own wisdom, do not know God, and cannot find him out. We are also informed upon the question in point that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God; and *vice versa* you notice it says the wisdom of God is foolishness to man. Man cannot comprehend God, and his wisdom before God is foolishness. He knows man's wisdom, and the Prophet David in contemplating the intelligence of God says, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” “He hath not dealt with us after our sins;” “For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” Therefore when God looks upon the human family and sees them exercising or putting forth their wisdom to comprehend him, he realizes their foolishness; and they cannot comprehend him nor understand his majesty, his might, and his divinity.

There's only a step between the sublime and the ridiculous, and in the age of the text and in the present age men speak disparagingly of God. They ridicule not only God the Father, but his Son Jesus Christ. Now I think it is fitting that we seek to learn upon what conditions the human family can knowingly, understandingly, and intelligently become acquainted with God and Jesus Christ, his Son, our Redeemer. If the world does not know him, and cannot find him

out, and their wisdom is foolishness with God, will God shut up the avenues of knowledge so that it will not be possible for man to become acquainted with him? We think he would be a very unjust and unkind Father to do that. But the Bible or the revelation contained therein tells us that it is profitable for man to become acquainted with God; but it emphatically tells us that no man knoweth the Father but the Son, and that no man knoweth the Son but the Father, and him to whom the Son reveals him. It requires a revelation from God to man to make him able to testify or answer the question, even though propounded in a derisive manner, in order that it can be intelligibly answered to them who God or the Almighty is. Jesus, speaking of the conditions of eternal life, says this: “This is life eternal that they might know thee.” That they might—making it possible that man could become acquainted with God. “This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” That eternal life rests upon the answer to this question who the Almighty is, and to answer it intelligibly, knowingly, and understandingly, that eternal life rests there, and without becoming acquainted with God, intelligently and properly, according to the conditions that he himself has laid down, no man is to hope for eternal life.

The first thought suggested in this text of Scripture regarding the Almighty is very broad. We shall not attempt to-day to enter into a digest of all that pertains to it, an analysis of it, for it is as high as heaven, as deep as the depths of the earth, and as broad as the universe; for there is no other God but the God who has created the heavens and the earth, the sea, and the fountains of water, who has created all things. The world has never been greatly in favor of worshipping the God of the universe, though they always

wanted a god; and those that have persisted in serving God truthfully and honestly have had to suffer. In the days in which Daniel lived there was a decree went forth that at a certain signal all that would not bow to a certain image in reverence and worship, should be punished. But Daniel believed, and understood, and realized that there was an Almighty different from what was set up by the powers of earth. He felt to worship him. He would pray. It was reported to the authorities that Daniel was persisting in praying to the God of Israel. The result was that he was cast into the lion's den. The sequel shows that he was protected. The Hebrew children were also punished, not because they would not worship a god, but because they persisted in worshipping the Almighty, the God of Israel, the only God that the human family find it profitable to worship; they were protected. And much more could be said concerning the ages of the past. And the nineteenth century is not an exception to the fact that men should be held to account for the God that they worship.

During the last year, 1893, the Latter Day Saints were brought before the tribunals of earth. One of the charges alleged against them was that they would persist in worshipping a God that had body, parts, and passions. Another charge was that they claimed that the God they worshiped revealed himself to his people as in ages past. That was a sad crime. It was asserted by the high council, or the Queen's council, of the Dominion of Canada, before the high tribunals of that government or dominion. And the Queen's counsel there when speaking against the Latter Day Saints having the right to be respected as a Christian denomination, presented in argument before the court and before the judges that were sitting that the Latter Day Saints believed that God had a body, parts, and passions; and that they believed that the God they worshiped re-

vealed himself in this age as in Bible times. The decision of the judge was something on this wise: in answering the plea of the Queen's council, two of the highest councilors of that dominion were before that court praying and speaking for the rights of the government and in Her Majesty's defense,—the judge says in reply:—

“This people's doctrine is in accordance with the Bible, and they are a Christian denomination in the highest sense.”

Speaking in answer to the argument made by the counsel he says: “Don't you believe that God has a body? The Bible says that God made man in his own image and after his own likeness.” “I am a man, and I have a *body*.”

If you will allow me to indulge in the expression of the thought a little further, he virtually advised that if the God of the human family or of the universe had not a body, has a man made after his own image and after his own likeness a body like him? “I am a man, and I've got a body; and am I greater, and bigger and more identical than the God I profess to worship?” is what he virtually implied.

Much could be said about the God the Bible represents, but many of you testify that you believe, peradventure some of you go further and testify that you know, that an angel has come from God in this age and has spoken, which is one of the features of the gospel. Well, the people in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people must worship the God that made the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. What does that imply? It implies that every nation, kindred, tongue, and people in the hour of God's judgment, when the angel should come, would not be worshipping that God. It would be out of place for the angel to instruct the one to bear the message to the people that they must worship the God that made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the fountains of

waters if they were doing it. But the history of the world proves that they have gods many, according to their various ideas of God, so that neither the preacher nor the people can comprehend him. But mark you, I am not the one that helped to formulate their creeds and to tell what they believe. They have told it themselves in that record. Back in the ages past, in the theological world, there was a power arose that bore rule over all the world, which I shall refer to only incidentally. It put forth a decree that the Bible should not be held, sold, or read except by the priests. Later on the decree went forth that no Bible should be translated into the vulgar tongue, and it should not be read by any persons but the priests. The only way they used to get rid of the heretics was to put them to death. And thousands were beheaded and gave their lives for the word of God, and yet, peradventure, had not had the testimony of Jesus. John could see under the altar the souls of them that had been beheaded for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus. Thousands have died for the word of God who didn't claim to have the testimony of Jesus in the sense of the Spirit of prophecy. Though hundreds were burned at the stake, slaughtered because they would read the word of God, the power that put forth such decrees as that put forth this.

Friends, I am not talking about something I am not acquainted with, for I have passed over the ground. They said in the catechism which is called the "Mothers' Catechism"—they knew that if they could get the mothers, "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world,"—if they could get the mothers educated, they would infuse the same sentiments into the child, that the world would soon grow up unto that that they wished to educate them into. In this "Mothers' Catechism," in the first part, it says that there "is but one true and living God; in

this Godhead are three, of one substance and power, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, without body, parts, or passions. Omniscient and omnipresent," here and elsewhere, everywhere and yet nowhere is virtually the interpretation of that thought. They bore rule over the world. The mothers trained the little ones up to believe such erroneous ideas. If I could digress in the thought that is introduced here with the education of the mothers and teachers of the Sunday school that have the tender buds in their care, I could show what a lesson is here; but I cannot digress into that thought, but pass into the line under consideration.

A generation passed, and in process of time Luther came out. From where? From where he had been educated, nourished. He had been taught that there was a God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit three in one; a substance without body, parts, or passions. He broke from under that yoke, carrying that tradition with him. When he formulated a creed, I ask you in the name of reason, what his faith would be? What God would he worship? Why, friends, as sure as water seeks its level, and as sure as tradition brings its fruits, so sure would he formulate a creed in accordance with his education, trained as he had been, born and raised a Roman Catholic. And so it was with the God ideas of Calvin, Knox, and on down until you come to Mr. Wesley; they were not teaching error consciously, for they labored and suffered and some died for what you and I are now enjoying, paving the way that the angel could come and tell the people that they must stop worshiping that kind of a God, but worship the God that made the earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. And the man who says that I speak disparagingly or disrespectfully of the memory of the Reformers misrepresents your humble servant. They have brought about much good and labored zealously to spread the

light they had received, and many, if you will allow me to repeat, have died to help to establish reformation, and the religious liberty that we are now enjoying. Are they to be blamed? They had been born and raised under such tradition, that is one of the strongest powers of earth, that is, tradition, and in some instances bigotry.

But just a few thoughts further concerning the effect of this tradition. I will speak of personal experience and observation to show the effect of tradition and how innocent and honest a man may be in error if he is not aware of his true condition before God. I have a brother about ten years older than I, who has been a Methodist preacher for a number of years, and I am not ashamed to speak in regard to the denominational name to which he belongs or represents. For thirty-five years he has been a representative of that faith. I believe he is an honest man, not because he is my brother, but because I am acquainted with him in his daily walks and his acts and can speak of him with more knowledge than I could of a stranger. I will testify, then, according to my experience. When I went and knocked at the door of his understanding and gave him to understand that the church which he was representing worshiped a God without a body, parts, or passions, what do you think the effect was? "Well," says one, "You made him mad." Make him mad? Would a man be offended when the God that he was worshiping was presented to him? Should he be offended about it? Well, now, friends, if you'll indulge me I will just act off a little as he did when I presented it to him. "Well," he says, "I guess I'll let you know that I am a-worshiping the God of the Bible, sir. I think I know what I have been doing these years past?" He says, "Tell me that we worship a God without any body, parts, or passions! No such a thing, sir."

Well, I would have irritated him if I persisted, I presume. But I decided that he was out of humor, and perhaps a little mad, so I dropped the question and went away for a day or two. When I returned he says, "Well, boys," (another brother was with me, a good-natured boy,) "Boys, I'm going to give you warning; I am going to get down my 'Disci-

pline' and show you that I don't worship any such a God." "All right," said Brother Amos. He got it down, and he read it, sitting at the end of the table. He read it three times, and jumped up and says, "I don't believe it," throwing it from him across the room. For thirty-five years he had been representing that, and now he says, "I don't believe it." I felt then as if he ought to have a little medicine, and I prepared to give it to him. It was pretty severe, but I thought it was the best time to give it to him. I says, "Brother Amos, you throw that discipline from you, sir, and you say you don't believe it? When you were ordained you obligated yourself that you would defend that faith, didn't you?" He didn't say yes, but I knew he had so obligated himself. "Now," I said, "sir, from this time forth if you go forth as a representative of that church, you have got to be branded with hypocrisy. You're a hypocrite." He did not say whether he felt he was a hypocrite or not, but I gave him the medicine. It had its desired effect in process of time, and I had the privilege of taking him in the water and baptizing him, and afterwards he was ordained an elder, and now he is representing the God of the Bible, that has a body, parts, and passions.

When Mr. T. L. Wilkinson, the champion debater of Canada, assailed the boy preacher before the world, he made this affirmation: "The God that the Methodist Church worships is the God of the Bible." But how long did he stand in defense of that? Just twenty minutes, and left the rostrum, and left the opera house where there were from six hundred to eight hundred people shouting, "Coward, coward; let him go." Friends, I present this not in a sense of boasting, but in this sense: that if he had understood his own discipline, if he had understood the faith that he was representing we would never have got onto the rostrum affirming that. He had never been waked up to it, friends. He was as innocent as a child. But when he was brought face to face with it he could not stand the issue.

Now, friends, much more could be said in defense of the God that Job represented, who was willing to answer those who were speaking mockingly, in a derisive manner of God; but now to the

second proposition. I shall have to be brief; time runs away: "That we should serve him." The manner of service is not commanded in the question. But the reason, "Who is this Almighty that we should serve him?" It does not say, "Who is this Almighty that we should know how to serve him?" That is not the question, but, "Why are we commanded to worship this Almighty?" Friends, language is inadequate to portray man's obligations to worship God. Turn to David when he was taking into consideration the God of Job and the God of Israel, declaring that the works of his hands were the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars, and all the creations, the oxen, and the sheep, and the cattle, and the birds, and the fishes, and all created for the use of man. He then exclaims, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" Friends, the sun in the heavens is created for our use and for our service; the moon hath unveiled herself to us to be our lamp at night; the earth yields forth to supply our wants, and all the vegetable, and animal, and mineral kingdoms are for the use of man; and it is but our reasonable service that we should present our bodies to God as a sacrifice, as our reasonable service. Now that idea could be enlarged upon, but I will just drop it at the door of your minds and you can think about it, for yourselves, and let God interpret and instruct.

Now we pass to the thought, How shall we worship? The philosophy of it comes up; it has been said to me at different times, "Why, if this man's only honest, that's all that is necessary." And others elsewhere folded their arms in ease and with solace and have said to me, "O well, now, Mr. Lake, when we die and get home in heaven the Lord will never ask what we have done." O no; I don't think he will: I don't think he will have any occasion to, because the book tells me that he will have no occasion to ask when we get home what way we came. Why? Because he says, "I am the way; . . . no man cometh unto the Father but by me." "He that climbeth up some other way," he tells us, is of the character that he is trying to steal and rob the honesty that belongs to Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us in a summary way how the human family shall worship

God. Once, while weary he was leaning upon the well curb and an individual came to draw water, and they entered into conversation, and the conversation was about worship—worshiping God—and finally the talk called forth this sentiment: All that worship God in this city, or in all the world, must worship him in spirit, and in truth. What is truth? "Thy word is truth," Jesus says (in the seventeenth chapter of John it is recorded), "Thy word is truth;" "sanctify them through thy truth." What spirit will lead into that truth? Why, the Comforter that Jesus said was the Spirit of truth, who, when he was come, would guide them into all truth, and bring to your minds all things, and show you things to come. Now that Spirit of truth is that which is to inspire the man that worships God in an acceptable manner to worship him in truth.

I have met with religious philosophers in this age who talked on this wise: "Thank the Lord," (and they were honest, friends, don't think that I'm reflecting upon their honesty and sincerity—I am only portraying their own acts,) putting their hands upon their hearts and saying, "Thank God, the Spirit bears witness with my spirit that I am a child of God; and if I were to die now I'd go right to heaven." When I drew their attention to this, to some of God's truth, some ordinance or some command they said, "O well, I don't think that's essential; I don't think that's essential, thank the Lord. His Spirit bears witness with my spirit that I'm going right home to heaven. There, these nonessentials; you put too much stress upon water; why, you make that a savior. You do away with the blood of Christ, and you impeach the testimony of hundreds who are living and of many who have died and gone home to heaven." I can't help it at all; I make no apology for Jesus; he says that man who worships must worship in spirit and in truth. I think it properly comes in this admonition where John says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." Now, the Spirit that will lead me into all truth is that one of which Jesus said he would pray the Father and the Father would send it to lead them into all truth

—if it would lead them into the truth, it will lead me into its confines also in order that I may be sanctified by the truth, and that the prayer of Jesus Christ may be answered upon me, that I may be saved and sanctified through the truth.

Says one, "But you people always want to preach baptism." Yes. "Well, that—that—that's making water a saving ordinance." Yes, of course. Ain't it? "O I can't think so." Don't you think baptism is a gospel ordinance? "O yes, certainly I do." Is not the gospel the power of God unto salvation? "Yes." The gospel is the power of God unto salvation and baptism is a gospel ordinance, and you're going to be saved without obedience to that? And saved by the gospel? My friends, see the dilemma people place themselves in by their own arguments. I don't have to stop to discriminate. One has said, "By thy words thou shalt be judged, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Why, friends, when we are brought before God all that is necessary to say is, "Have you complied with this law, this word? You were to be sanctified through it. Have you obeyed this word? Have you come up in the right way? Can you claim sanctification? Have you obeyed my gospel?" "Well, but then," some one says, "you don't mean to tell me that water baptism is an ordinance! Why, a man away out on the desert may get converted, and if he happens to die, he's got to go to hell because there is no water out there?" and all such arguments as that. "Well, but what would you say? If a man is out on the desert and he is converted to the law, to make him perfect according to that testimony, what would you do?" Why, he can't live without water and wherever he can exist long enough to get water to drink, to live upon, he'll live long enough to get to where he will have water to be baptized in. And, friends, if you are going to make a special case, I'll admit that there is a possibility of miracle, and bring the special to keep the place of the law. The thief is also fetched in. Ah, friends, the account of the thief has been used as more authority than any other portion of the Scriptures. According to disbelievers in baptism the Lord has shipped more men to heaven by this one passage than by any other one passage in the Bible.

There was a murderer in Canada; I was there when he was hung. Had I understood a little more about wire pulling I might have got him saved, but I don't think men can be saved unconditionally. But what was the testimony of the minister that prayed on the gallows: "O Lord, grant that the soul of this man may be sent to thee like the arrow from the bow, and enter into thine immediate presence." Friends, why was he hung? Because he killed his wife, and it was proven. He had been born and raised right there in that vicinity, and he had been from his youth a reckless man and at last a murderer. Why, if it is possible to send such a man as that right from the gallows direct to God, I afraid that if such characters are there they'll have such dispositions that if they should ever get into the glorified city they would be digging up the golden streets. I, friends, cannot indorse that. And if you talk with any of the ministers they will say, "Why, my dear sir, didn't the thief go right straight to heaven—to paradise?" If I cannot prove that the thief was a baptized disciple I cannot prove that baptism is a saving ordinance. But I will not attempt to do it this morning. If anyone wants to hold me responsible for that I will meet the issue any time.

Now to the closing thought: prayer. Just indulge me a few moments. What profit have you got from all the prayers you have offered? that's the question. what profit is there if we pray unto God? Now let me step across the line again from the sublime to the ridiculous just a moment and hear Robert Ingersoll; Mr. Ingersoll, with all due reverence to him as a gentleman, a man of gigantic thought and brain, and what do we have? When James A. Garfield was lying a suffering man under the hands of the assassin, Ingersoll said Ha! ha! "the prayers of fifty millions went up from this nation, and the prayers of all the civilized world went up to God; but God didn't have power to save one man, and the President had to die." Now that was as much as to say, What profit is there in praying? what did it amount to?

Now friends, bringing myself before you, not as an example of perfection nor anything of that kind, but just to portray the idea; twenty-four years I

have been trying to serve God, and under the admonition of Christ, "pray always, and in everything give thanks," I have been offering prayers at the family altar and privately. What profit was it to you? says one. I can say truthfully that in some instances I have seen answers, have felt the effect. We read in the Bible of a man praying and the whole heavens were affected by it, so much so that it did not rain again for three years and six months. He went out again and prayed, and the whole heavens had to obey, and the rain fell. That certainly was a very visible demonstration of answer to prayer and the benefits that accrue. Some have gone so far as to say they don't believe in having family prayer, for they say, "what's the benefit of it?" Well, we have to meet many that do not have family prayer, and when we suggest the thought, "O," they say, "the idea of having prayer every morning and every night, and so frequently!" They don't just say, "What's the benefit," but they say, "I don't think it's necessary."

The Lord says in the Book of Covenants, that in Zion he that will not remember his prayers in the season thereof shall be held in account before the judge of his people. The Scriptures admonish that we must pray always. And yet, what is prayer? I believe before God there have been thousands of prayers offered, not only by the Latter Day Saints, but by the world that never went very high, that never profited anything. I am talking about the sincere desire of the heart and soul. The poet says:—

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed."

That is the thought.

Now turn with me to John the Revelator and we will see where the prayers of the Saints have gone, and what is the use of them, the benefit that is to accrue. In fifth chapter we find in that vision that passed before John's understanding concerning the book sealed with the seven seals, there was nobody found in heaven, nor in earth, nor under the earth that could, or dared to attempt to open the book or break the seals. "And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one

of them harps, and golden vials full of odors." The vials are full of odors. Now what are the odors? "Which are the prayers of Saints." Why, does this portray that the prayers of God's people are vialled up or kept in reservation before God? What is the use? what does the Lord want of them? Let us turn to the eighth chapter, and there we have the explanation. It brings in again, if you will allow me to repeat it:—

"God his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain,"

and will tell the story, answer the question from the Bible standpoint, from the revelations of God. In the eighth chapter he says, commencing at the third verse: "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all Saints upon the golden altar." Then, friends, we have the idea revealed to us here that our prayers are not in vain if they are honest and sincere before God. They are kept in their place, in remembrance, held there in a vial in preservation, and eventually will be placed on the golden altar. This incense passed up before God in honor and praise to him for his parental watchcare and lovingkindness, and for his preserving hand which has been over us, thus honoring him, and the incense shall go to the golden altar to God, to Jesus Christ, our great Advocate. Then, friends, take courage and continue your prayers. Respect God by returning thanks when it is becoming and proper for you to do it.

One more quotation to show you that even an honest thought is not forgotten. The Lord in Malachi says: "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." It says, there shall be a book of remembrance, and when he comes to number up his jewels, "They shall be mine." They shall be his, the people that "thought upon his name." May God help us to have holy thoughts, righteous desires, and comply with the conditions that will entitle us to eternal life, that we may understand the Almighty. Amen.

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