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WHY I BECAME A LATTER DAY SAINT.



ELDER JOSEPH LUFF.

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WHY I BECAME A LATTER DAY SAINT.

SERMON BY ELDER JOSEPH LUFF.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men.—Acts 24: 14-16.

When the apostle uttered these words he was in a peculiar position, one, however, strikingly similar to that which the true minister for Christ is compelled to occupy sometimes, even in our day. To discern this, you have but to consider the nature of the change made and the profession of those making it. He was accused of being a *heretic* and confessed to it, if he was to be judged by the tradition of his accusers. His accusers professed belief in the "law and the prophets," and yet his only heresy consisted in preaching what these contained.

They were then, as now, at least two ways of believing the Scriptures; one was an acceptance of them in the light of such interpretation as the priests might place upon them, without careful perusal and examination as to their contents in detail; the other, that of first opening the book, taking no man's word for what they contained, reading carefully what was found within them, page after page, making application of what was found revealed therein in governing the individual life and developing the individual character, and so far as might be possible to furnish a living illustration in us of the potency of the divinity connected therewith. This second manner of believing the Scriptures they were unacquainted with; and when the Apostle Paul came as a believer after this order, he came so directly in contact with what they had been accustomed to, that they were led at the very outset to pronounce him a heretic. Yet we find him defining his heresy by declaring himself a believer in all things that were written in the law and in the prophets, in effect challenging them to bring from out the law or the prophets, which they themselves acknowledged to be divine, anything that by legitimate

construction or application could be shown to be antagonistic to his teaching or attitude.

Further explaining himself before Felix, he added: "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men." He meant, as I understand him, that the law and the prophets had been furnished in the wisdom of God for the education of the human conscience. He had studied in detail their contents, and had made the discovery that certain things with which he had not thoroughly acquainted himself in time past were true. Instantly his conscience under the new education, made an appeal to him. That appeal required of him, in answering it faithfully, that he should admit the newly recognized truths as a force into his life and life work. The difference, therefore, between him and those who were his accusers, was, that he found himself, in answering to that conscience, under the necessity of "exercising" himself daily in carrying out that law, instead of simply making the announcement, as they had done, that mentally he assented to its truth.

Strange as it may appear to some the true minister of Jesus Christ

finds himself in very much the same attitude today as did the Apostle Paul. He brought no new Scriptures to them, but pointed to those already furnished him by them; and like those who had preceded him, he had required of them that they search their own Scriptures, for in them, as the Savior said, they believed they had eternal life, and they were they that testified of Christ, and by a judgment properly rendered thereon or therefrom he was willing to abide. I bring no other Bible to you today than that of which a copy rests on your center tables at home. In that I find all I need as a minister of the faith of the church of which I stand a member and a representative today; yet, as in the Apostle's day, I find myself surrounded by a people, some of whom, before I was born, engaged in the work of publishing and asking the world to believe that Bible. It dropped as a consequence into my hands. Finding what is recorded in it, I begin to proclaim its contents and make the announcement that to enjoy such benefits as flow from a belief therein is the common privilege of the brotherhood of man—the children of God everywhere. But no sooner have I made this announcement

than the very individuals who placed this Bible in my hand and asked that I should believe its contents, call upon me to give a reason and a defense for believing what is in it. That is the anomaly of the situation; for I solemnly aver that I have subscribed to no branch of philosophy, no point of doctrine that I am aware of, that has not its authority and sanction in this word.

During the five years of my ministry in a popular church before entering this, I was as honest at that time as I claim to be now. My heart's chief desire was to glorify God, but all I knew in regard to the will of God was what was conveyed to me by the church of which I was a member. When in my twenty-second year a leaflet reached me by mail, setting forth the principles of the doctrine of Christ. The instant I read that pamphlet or leaflet I made the discovery that there was something in it that was materially different from the doctrine I had been subscribing to, and for a time I paid no particular attention to it because of that. The thought had never yet entered my head that anything in the line of religion could be right that was con-

trary to what my mother had taught me.

Another leaflet came later and upon reading it I was impressed with its scriptural accuracy, and with the thought that in that accuracy was revealed its antagonism to my former faith, wherever its teachings differed from the faith I had been subscribing to, but it agreed in all its particulars with the New Testament; hence my former faith could not therefore be in agreement with the New Testament. Of course this was in a measure painful to me. All the associations I had formed in life clustered around the religious institution I was connected with; parent, relatives, friends, and hope of prosperity; everything upon which to base a calculation looking to benefits in this life clustered around my identity with that church. But on the other side stood the Bible, and God and conscience. I could not "exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men," by remaining where I had been.

My attitude as a minister of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ today is one of the results of the decision thus reached over twenty years ago. Actuated by a "good

conscience," which had its education in the word of God, I moved forward and found in this church a better introduction to, and a more familiar acquaintance with Jesus the Christ, than I had ever enjoyed before, or could see any prospect of elsewhere. And that is all that any religion is good for to me or mankind, as I view the matter. The clergyman with whom I had been an associate for years, called on me and expressed deep regret over my resignation, also his fear and sorrow for me as a man. I listened till he had ventilated his feelings pretty well, and then a dialogue about as follows was entered into:

"Why are you sorry and fearful for me? Do you think I am in danger?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Well, let me enquire closely, and find wherein I am in danger. Do you not believe what you and I have been preaching together for years, viz., that if a man will simply believe with all his heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, he will be saved, and that is all that is needful unto salvation?"

"Yes; I do believe that or I would not preach it."

"What reason have you for thinking that I no longer believe

with all my heart that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world?"

"I don't know that I have any reason for such thought as that."

"Then, sir, I certify to you, and hope you will give me credit for truth and honesty, that I do still believe with all my heart that Jesus is the only Savior of the world. Will not that faith stand me as much in hand outside of the church that you are in as it would if I still remained within? Have you a particular right by which you hold it and under which you exempt all other people from the benefit of that faith?" "No, sir." "Jesus said, 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' He authorized his ministers to teach not only that men should believe, but that they should be baptized. Accepting Jesus Christ as good authority, I have received baptism by immersion at the hands of one who has been called, as he believes, in these last days to officiate in this rite. You have often told me that by what is found in this book we are to be judged in the last days, and as this book requires this ordinance at my hands will you please tell me whether or not you believe that Jesus Christ will damn Joseph

Luff because he has been baptized according to scriptural requirement, if Joseph Luff still believes with all his heart that Jesus is the Christ and the only Savior of the world?"

"No, I don't think he will condemn you for being baptized."

I referred to two or three passages of Scripture setting forth the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit, and then said:

"Believing these, I have permitted the minister who baptized me, in association with others, to place his hands upon my head and confirm me a member of the Church of Christ; and I received the Holy Ghost. Now, if these Scriptures are to judge me at the last day, will God damn me simply because I allowed those men to place their hands upon my head, notwithstanding I still believe with all my heart that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world?"

"No, sir."

"You told me once that you believed there was a degree of divine inspiration had in producing some books, such as 'The Prince of the House of David,' and others. Does that idea, in your way of thinking, discount the Scriptures for a moment?"

“No, sir.”

“Well, I have been led to believe that there was a degree of inspiration (both as to its origin and contents) of the Book of Mormon. I believe that Joseph Smith, who was instrumental in producing that work, was directed by the counsel of God, I do this because of the evidence that came to me? Will God condemn me because I believe Joseph Smith was an inspired man, because I believe there was an authority of inspiration about the Book of Mormon, if I still believe that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world?”

“No, sir, I don’t think he will; your salvation depends upon your belief in Jesus Christ.”

“Then,” said I, “instead of your being sorry for me, it seems to me it is my turn to express sorrow for you. The Bible teaches the laying on of hands, and the doctrine of baptism for the remission of sins. I believe these doctrines. You do not. You say God will not damn me for these extra points in my faith if I still believe that Jesus is the Christ. Hence according to your position, I am saved because I believe with all my heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. Now, if in the day of ac-

counts the great God shall bring up this record, as he said he would, and judge me by things that Jesus Christ said when he was upon the earth, and I find that he taught and practiced baptism and the laying on of hands, will you in that day be as safe as me? Your doctrine being true, I am saved; but if mine be true, where will you stand? If you do not open the book and read it, and 'exercise' yourself 'to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men,' by observing it, what will be the result to you? It is *my* place to be sorry, and I am sorry for *you*. If your doctrine is right, I am saved; and if mine is right, I am saved; but if mine should eventually prove to be right and yours to be wrong, you are on the unsafe side, and this, too, according to your own admission."

So ended our dialogue, and he left me forever.

If I should ask you today, why you accept the principle of faith as being an essential to salvation, you would open the Bible and read: "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life." "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," and you will tell

me as I have told you, "Because the Scriptures teach it." Here, then, we agree.

Next, why do you accept repentance as an essential? Evidently because Jesus authorized his servants to declare that men should "repent and believe the gospel." I then ask why, when Latter Day Saints approach the subject of baptism as being essential unto salvation equally with faith and repentance, you are unwilling to shake hands with us and still move forward? Is it because the Bible is not equally plain in regard to its necessity? If the language of Christ is worth anything, it is worth as much in one case as another, and he stated to Nicodemus, as recorded in the third chapter of John, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot [now you write it down, he *cannot*, he CANNOT] enter into the kingdom of God." It matters but little how many men may rise up in this or in subsequent generations and say he *can*; Jesus has uttered it, "he *cannot*," and if I honor the Bible command, I am compelled to allow God and Christ to be true, though by so doing I prove every man to be a liar.

Imagine you see a blackboard with the words, "WATER BAP-

TISM," written across the top. Under this there is a line, and the space below is divided into two columns by a center line, drawn from top to bottom. As a subheading, at the top of the first column write, *For the Remission of Sins.* At the top of the other column write, *Not For the Remission of Sins.* Now, under the first column heading write the names of witnesses, as I shall give them to you, who testify as to baptism being necessary. I shall call your attention, as I go along, to places in the Scriptures where I find them: In the first chapter of St. Luke there is an account furnished in regard to the birth of John the Baptist. Associated therewith and preceding it, of the visitation of an angel to Zacharias. This Zacharias was visited by an angel who told him that his wife should give birth to a son, told him the name of that son should be John, and what the nature of his work should be. When the babe was born and the friends assembled to witness its religious recognition, the Spirit of the Lord rested upon Zacharias, and turning to the child he said:

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his

ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.

Now, I did not put that into the Bible. I take another translation and I read, "By baptism for the remission of sins." You will all agree that he baptized them in water for the remission of sins, hence either translation will do. Zacharias declared that John's mission work was to bring to the people means for the remission of sins, and John afterward did it by baptism. Now, is there any man or woman in the tent who will not give me the right to have the letters written down, *Z-a-c-h-a-r-i-a-s*, as a witness testifying to the doctrine of baptism for the remission of sins?

I turn to Luke, beginning at the first chapter, and read:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things.

What is the testimony he bears on this subject? In the third chapter he testifies that John came "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." If Luke had a perfect knowledge, and was

an eye witness of these things from the beginning, will you have any objection to my writing down the name of Luke, as a competent witness certifying to the fact that John preached and practiced baptism for the remission of sins?

I will turn now to the third chapter of Luke, also the first chapter of Mark, and the third chapter of Matthew, and find evidence in each place that John came into the region of country about Judea and "did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Will anyone object to my writing down the name of John the Baptist as a competent witness that baptism is for the remission of sins?

I turn to the ninth, twenty-second and twenty-sixth chapters of Acts, and in each of these places find an account of the journey of Saul to Damascus, carrying with him letters of authority, on the strength of which he was going to persecute the members of the infant Christian church. He was visited on the way by Christ; a light shone upon him, and destroyed his power of natural sight for the time being. A voice from heaven asked him as to his course. Saul answered, "Who art thou, Lord?" and Jesus said, "I am

Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Then the question from Saul's lips was, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Hear the answer: "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do?" In the city he is visited by a man named Ananias. This man had been authorized to give him instruction according to Christ's command, what he *must* do to be saved. This Ananias said to him, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Hence, I write his name down as testifying that baptism is to wash away sin.

Now, I turn to the second chapter of Acts and read that a number of people convicted by gospel preaching asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" For answer to that question read from the fourteenth verse to the end of the chapter, and you have this announcement, that Peter and the rest of the eleven rose up and testified that they should repent and be baptized, every one of them, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins. Hence, I write the name of Peter and the rest of the eleven, as testifying on Pentecost that baptism

was for the remission of sins. We are told also in this chapter that these men spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. Jesus had told them to wait for the endowment which then came by which they were to be made witnesses for him. Hence the *Holy Ghost* may be set down as a witness that baptism is for the remission of sins?

Who sent the Holy Ghost? Jesus says, "If I depart, I will send him unto you;" and, "He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you." I ask you, Who sent Ananias to Saul in the city of Damascus? When he came to Saul he put his hands upon him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me," etc. Jesus told him to tell Saul to be baptized to wash away his sins. Read John 3: 5 again, and I am sure you will not object to me writing down the name of "Jesus Christ" as teaching and authorizing men to teach that baptism is for remission of sins.

When Jesus had himself submitted to this ordinance at the hands of John, whose voice was it that rent the atmosphere, pealing forth from the heavens and saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am

well pleased?" The eternal Father was pleased with the fact that his Son, Jesus Christ, had not considered himself above submission to the ordinance for the remission of sins that he himself had sent John to preach and practice. Who sent John to baptize for the remission of sins? He said, when speaking of Christ, "He that sent me to baptize with water said unto me," etc. The book says, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." If God sent him to do that work; if God, honoring the appointment of Jesus Christ, afterward sent the Spirit on the day of Pentecost; if Jesus spoke the truth when he said: This Holy Ghost when it comes, shall take of the things of God and show them unto you, then baptism for the remission of sins was one of the things to be shown unto them of God that was shown on the day of Pentecost. If the Pharisees and lawyers rejected God's counsel by refusing John's baptism (see Luke 7:30), then God must have counseled it.

If all things Jesus taught were commanded by his Father, as he said (see John 12: 49, 50; also 3: 5) may I not write down Jehovah, the eternal God, as authorizing the doctrine and practice of bap-

tism for the remission of sins?

I have the authority then for having written here, Zacharias, Luke, John the Baptist, Ananias, Peter and the rest of the eleven, the Holy Ghost, Jesus Christ and Jehovah. When I stand before the judgment seat I will be perfectly willing to take any one or all of these names as authority for the testimony that affected my life and the counsel under which I acted when I was baptized for the remission of sins.

Next column now: Baptism *not* for the remission of sins. Somebody please give me the name of a man whose word you would sooner take than the word of the witnesses I have given. Let us hear from him. Put D. D. to it, if you want to; put LL. D. at the end; put all you want to in order to make it sound important or give it tone. Name any man that you ever heard of that you will be willing to place there and whom you will be ready to accept as your backer at the day of judgment when you have to meet all these testimonies to the contrary. If one will not do, name two, or I will take three. I will fill out that column, and we will turn the board over and fill up the other side till you get enough.

BAPTISM.

FOR THE REMISSION
OF SINS.

Zacharias.

Luke.

John the Baptist.

Ananias.

Peter and the rest of
the eleven.

The Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ.

Jehovah, the Eter-
nal God.

NOT FOR THE RE-
MISSION OF SINS.

I am figuring in religion for the eternal years; for friendship with Christ, who said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." I am, like the Apostle Paul, willing to stand under the brand of heresy in this world because I believe "*all* things which are written in the law and in the prophets" and I am exercising myself daily "to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men?" To me, and those I represent, the word, and law and promises of God are at par. They exact all they ever did, and they confer as much. Hence you always find us contending for an observance of all things commanded therein and for the enjoyment of all things promised therein. There is no attempt to discount either, for our God is unchangeable and impartial, and his word once spoken

represents him forever and to all persons.

When I came through Canada they refused to take one of our American dollars for a dollar's worth of goods that I bought, and I called their attention to the fact that on its face was "one dollar." They said it was at a discount there. I remembered that I was under a different government there; but if I had come back to the United States and somebody had refused to accept that dollar for a hundred cents' worth of goods, I would have been surprised. If I was to go into what was proclaimed by the infidels as a hellfire club, where they were traducing or denouncing all Scripture doctrine, and I wanted to put some scripture before them, I would expect, of course, that they would seek to discount it, and that very heavily; but when I come into a building that has its steeple pointing up to heaven and on the front of it the words, "This is the Lord's house," that it is under his government, I expect that when I offer a scriptural dollar, if I may use the figure, they will honor it for all its face calls for; but, unfortunately, they do not, and I am compelled to reach the conclusion that they are not under the divine government

that issued the coin. Of course it is but natural that such will discount it if they want to. But it bears the image and superscription of Christ notwithstanding, and he will honor it here and hereafter, and honor those who honored it.

I have no reason today for believing that God has gone out of the original business that engaged his attention; I have no reason for believing that angels have changed their employment, for believing that the Holy Ghost is engaged in any other enterprise than that in which it embarked centuries ago. Hence, if this Bible informs me correctly as to their former attributes and purposes, I must expect that the draft I make upon them by my obedience to the ancient word will be honored to the last farthing represented on the face of that word.

Suppose that before leaving this place I announce to you that I will be back here in five years and I will still remain the same man in every respect; but at the end of five years, instead of stepping up nimbly as I did here today, some one should have to carry me up, and I would stand as a piece of statuary, not uttering a word. You would begin to ply me with ques-

tions, and urge me to answer about some things that are engaging your thought and your attention; but I remain without a movement of hand, or feet, or features in any shape. By and by, by some extraordinary pressure, I am induced to wink an eye, or to shake a fist, or to stamp my feet, or to make some kind of a gesture that is a little strange in itself. One man here would say, "I know what he meant;" he would turn around and explain to the people just what I meant. Another man over there would begin, and another somewhere else, and there would be any amount of interpretations of these strange movements on the part of this piece of statuary before you. Now, though you might divide on all these points of interpretation, there is one thing you would be agreed upon, and that is, that Elder Luff had changed, and very materially, too. Before he was talkative, now he is dumb; before he was willing to express his feelings, now there is nothing but a gesture here, and only a movement there, that nobody can do any better than guess at the meaning of.

In this connection think of the important fact that in the years gone by when God was in the busi-

ness of saving men, angels were connected with him in the work, and they talked with men, gave visions, revelations, and instructions to men upon the sole condition that they would observe this law that I have been calling your attention to; and he said he would always remain the same unchangeable, impartial Jehovah; and we hear of him eighteen hundred years later. Does he talk like he used to? O no! If anybody says that God talks now, set him down as a Latter Day Saint or a fool. Does he give any visions now by the intervention of his Spirit? Ah no! Nobody claims that but fanatics. What is there then about him by which we shall identify this God with the God of the former times? If he gives nothing today as he formerly gave it, it is a serious question, and I sum it up in this way: Just as it would be hard for you to believe that I had not changed if I had acted in the way I have represented, so it ought to be hard for you to believe that the great God who talked for four thousand years where there was a church or proper members of the church ready to hear, is now dumb, but still remains the unchangeable God. How can you escape the conclusion that the Almighty who

talked for about four thousand years has changed if he talks no more?

The heresy of Latter Day Saints, like that of Paul, consists in their believing that when God once revealed his will and promises he wanted to be believed for all that was in them as long as the earth should stand. I bless God for the good that reached me through my former church association. I bless him more for the glory of his later revelation to me through my entrance into a church that teaches his whole law, where his word is at par.

Do not do us the injustice that others have done, of confounding us with the people known as "Mormons," whose church headquarters are in Utah. We have no church affiliation with them. We are the avowed and uncompromising antagonists of the obnoxious features of their faith which have made their name synonymous with vice and shame in the nation. The ancient law to which we subscribe, and the revelations received by the church, are a unit in upholding virtue and denouncing such crimes as polygamy; hence we can have no fellowship where that doctrine and its outgrowth are endorsed. Our heresy,

as I have shown, consists in believing all things enjoined of God, and not in any violation of any divine or human law. The testimony of this fact I leave with you, asking God's blessing upon it and you.

WHAT WE BELIEVE.

We believe in God the Eternal Father, and in His Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.

We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.

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

We believe that these ordinances are: First, Faith in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ; Second, Repentance; Third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; Fourth, Laying on of Hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost; Fifth, We believe in the Resurrection of the body; that the dead in Christ will rise first, and the rest of the dead will not live again until the thousand years are expired; Sixth, We believe in the doctrine of Eternal Judgment, which provides that men shall be judged, rewarded or punished, according to the degree of good or evil they shall have done.

We believe that a man must be Called of God, and ordained by the Laying on of Hands of those who have authority from God to entitle him to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.

We believe in the same kind of organization that existed in the primitive church, viz: Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers, Evangelists, etc.

We believe that in the Bible is contained the word of God, so far as it is translated correctly. We believe that the canon of Scripture is not full, but that God, by His Spirit, will continue to reveal his word to man until the end of time.

We believe in the powers and gifts of the Everlasting Gospel, viz: The gift of faith, discerning of spirits, prophecy, revelation, healing, visions, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues, wisdom, charity, brotherly love, etc.

We believe that Marriage is ordained of God; and that the law of God provides for but one companion in wedlock, for either man or woman, except in cases where the contract of marriage is broken by death or transgression.

We believe that the doctrines of a plurality and a community of wives are heresies, and are opposed to the law of God.

We believe that the religion of Jesus Christ, as taught in the New Testament Scriptures, will, if its precepts are accepted and obeyed, make men and women better in the domestic circle, and better citizens of town, county, and state, and consequently better fitted for the change which cometh at death.

We believe that men should worship God in "Spirit and in truth," and that such worship does not require a violation of the constitutional law of the land.

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