

Sermon Subject: THE FULLNESS OF THE GOSPEL

Scripture: Revelation 14:6 and 7.

And I say another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.

Once upon a time I went into a book store and bought a book. It was nicely bound, and beautifully printed. I took it home and began to read; and the subject matter was interesting and instructive. Then suddenly there came a break in the continuity of thought, and when I examined the book more carefully to see what was the matter, I found that somehow in the preparation of the book for binding, one whole section of 64 pages had been omitted. The part that remained was good; but I had paid for a whole book, and I wanted the whole book. So, I took it back to the bookseller, showed him the mistake, and got a complete book to replace the defective one. In these days of pocket digests and book condensations, we can be satisfied sometimes with partial books, if the condensations contain all the essentials. But when a book is highly important and significant -- and especially if you pay full price for it -- you want all the book, not a part of it.

Jesus came preaching a full and complete gospel -- a gospel which was adequate to meet every need of man. He was mindful of the physical needs of people, as is indicated by his miracles of the loaves and fishes, and turning the water to wine. He recognized their need of physical healing, as is evidenced by his many miracles of healing. He recognized the need of social readjustment; and he taught men how to order their lives so that there would be no friction or hatred or warfare between men or between nations. He recognized certain mental needs; he himself was familiar with the laws and books and the learning of his people; he taught his disciples; and he promised them a Holy Comforter which should teach them all things, and guide them into all truth. He recognized man's need for deliverance from sin, and from death which is the result of sin; and he therefore laid down certain laws and principles and ordinances by which men could find forgiveness of sin and hope of a resurrection of the body.

Jesus organized a church which was to be his instrument in implementing and carrying out the full and complete gospel which he preached. Not that the organization was completed during Jesus' lifetime! But it was begun, and the blueprints laid down. Then under the impulsion of the Holy Spirit, after Pentecost, the apostles carried out those plans, adding to them as they were directed by the Spirit of their Master, until a church existed which was complete, and adequate to teach and to carry into operation the fullness of the gospel which Jesus had preached.

You are entitled to a fullness of the gospel today. No condensation or simplification of it will do. All of it is necessary to a complete and full and satisfactory salvation. Many churches today offer the gospel in part. Like the incomplete book which I bought, their doctrine is all right as far as it goes; their organization to implement that doctrine is all right as far as it goes.

But something is always lacking, or the emphasis is too much on one aspect of the gospel, while other equally essential parts are soft-pedalled or omitted entirely. Some preachers will tell you that all you have to do is to believe on Christ, and be saved. That is partly true, but it is not all the truth. Some churches place most of their emphasis on ritual, ceremony, and ordinance. That is good, but it is not all. Some churches base almost their whole philosophy on a belief in and practice of spiritual and divine healing. Some emphasize diet; some Sabbath observance; some authoriatarian government; some democracy in church government; some social service; some foreign missions; some education; some a belief in the survival of spirits. None of us would quarrel with any of these beliefs; but we might safely dispute with any man or any church which stresses one to the exclusion of others, or omits even one essential portion of the gospel of Christ, and then purports to sell it as the fullness of the gospel.

Many churches purporting to be the church of Christ, and to have the fullness of his gospel, have pastors, but no deacons; elders, but no apostles; bishops but no prophets; gifts of wisdom, but no gifts of healing; gifts of knowledge, but no gifts of tongues or prophecy. The church which is entitled to call itself by the name of Christ will have a complete and fully adequate organization, such as existed in the New Testament church. It will have authority to function and minister in the name of God. As a result of this authoritative ministry, functioning through a complete and perfect organization, certain signs or results will follow -- not just one or two, but all of the spiritual gifts promised to the church and experienced by it during the period covered by the New Testament.

The church is Christ's body on earth -- the instrument through which he gives his blessings and accomplishes his work. A church handicapped by inadequacy or lack anywhere cannot give a complete ministry, or supply to its members a fullness of gospel teachings or gospel blessings.

The first or primary mission of the church is to bear witness for Christ, and to preach the fullness of his gospel to every creature. The fullness of that gospel, preached and witnessed and practiced by a complete and perfect church, will save men from sin and death -- individually and collectively. It will save them from the sins that bring sickness and disease and suffering. It will save them from the economic sins that bring want and poverty in the midst of plenty. It will save them from the social sins that divide men into classes and races and nations, and then set them one against the other. It will save men from the personal sins of hatred, jealousy, selfishness, pride, and envy, which divide men from their neighbors. It will save men from the sins of worry, fear, and doubt, which obsess men's lives and haunt their minds. It will save men from their sins of impurity, of laziness, of ignorance, of intolerance.

It is interesting to note how Jesus refused to be drawn aside or tricked into putting undue emphasis on any single phase of his gospel. Some wanted him to concentrate on the political angle, and overthrow Rome so that he could set up his own worldly kingdom. He contented himself with teaching principles that one day should overthrow not only Rome, but all other empires built on similar foundations. When two men came asking that he divide their inheritance between them, he refused to get involved in the particulars of such a task, but laid down the principle, "Beware of covetousness." The Pharisees would have been better pleased had he placed more emphasis on the laws of diet and ceremonial cleanliness; but he ignored their narrow teachings to lay down the principle that it is what comes from inside a filthy heart that defiles a man, not what he puts into his mouth. He might have placed all his emphasis on keeping the Sabbath -- but he said practically nothing about it.

The fullness of the gospel is well-balanced, well-rounded, complete. It is efficacious in overcoming all manner of sin, personal, collective, corporate. It is based on six principles laid down by Paul in the 6th chapter of Hebrews, and taught by Jesus and the apostles - six principles which must be fully taught and fully obeyed, if there is to be a fullness of blessing. First the believer must have faith. Then he must confess this faith by accepting baptism as the symbol of a new birth and his acceptance into the family of God, with Christ as his elder brother. Then the laying on of hands brings the gift of the Holy Ghost as a sign and seal of his adoption, giving him hope of a resurrection, and assurance in the day of the eternal judgment.

When the principles of the gospel are obeyed, Christ fulfills his promise of an abiding Comforter to dwell with those who have started in the gospel way. When this Comforter came to the saints on the day of Pentecost, some very definite things happened as vindication of Jesus' promises, and testimony that he was with them, as he had promised to be even to the end of the world. The New Testament church enjoyed gifts of prophecy, gifts of tongues, gifts of healing, gifts of wisdom and knowledge, gifts of miracles. The church of Christ today should have and can have all these blessings, if it teaches with authority the fullness of Christ's gospel, and obeys and practices all that it teaches.

Latter Day Saints claim a restoration of divine authority after it had been lost in the apostasy, through departure from the teachings of the New Testament church, and the changing or discarding of many principles which once combined to make the fullness of the gospel. They claim to be organized as the New Testament church was organized -- not with just part of the officers, but with all of them. In our church organization they have prophets, apostles, seventies, elders, bishops, priests, teachers, deacons, evangelists, and pastors. Within this organizational framework there is an officer to meet every human need. The spiritual needs are met through rites, ordinances, ceremonies, and worship; through preaching and teaching. The intellectual needs are met by a program of education, which includes not only spiritual, but secular things. The need for personal counselling and ministry in the home as well as in the meetings of the church, is met by certain officers whose duty it is to visit the homes, counsel the members, teach them their religious duties, strengthen those who are weak, and gently but firmly rebuke those who are straying.

The church includes in its teaching the gospel of good health, by offering counsel in matters of diet and right living, and by sponsoring scientific aids to healing and health. It also includes a belief in and practice of divine healing, after the pattern laid down for the New Testament Church, in which the elders anointed the sick with oil and prayed over them. The church has a program of social service, designed to alleviate poverty and want. It has a much larger program for social reform, looking towards the establishment of an ideal community in which men will live by the principle of stewardship, giving of their best talents according to their capacities, and receiving according to their needs and just wants, with the surplus consecrated to the welfare of the group. The church includes in its gospel a policy of loyalty to worldly governments under which the rights and freedoms of men are protected and guaranteed.

With the fullness of the gospel, we can testify that there do come the spiritual gifts which were experienced by the New Testament church. We are not strangers to the gift of prophecy, or the gifts of tongues, or spiritual healing. We can testify that the gospel is sufficient to cleanse us of our sins, and renew a right spirit within us, if we are obedient to its principles. We have found that if we will accept it in its fullness, it will banish fear, guilt, hatred, worry, selfishness, envy, pride. We have faith and hope that by the fullness of the gospel which we know, we shall be redeemed from death. We have faith that when we learn more completely how to live the fullness of the gospel we know,

and when more men have been led to this perfection with us, much of the maladjustment and sin of the world will also be overcome.

We ask you today to examine the gospel to which you have given allegiance. Have you the FULLNESS of the gospel, or are there many important parts of it missing, as the 64 pages of my new book were missing? Does your gospel offer you release from the guilt and bondage of sin? Does it offer hope to sinners who died without having opportunity to hear of Christ, or to accept him? Does your gospel offer the assurance of life after death? Does it offer you gifts of healing when you are sick? Does it offer a definite program of world-wide political and social reform? Does it offer you authority, and at the same time democracy in church government? Does it stand for education, for philanthropy and charity? Does it offer any teachings about diet and health? Does it teach a scriptural principle of tithing? Does it minister to home and family, as well as to individuals? Does it offer a church organization which gives you the authoritative, present-day ministry of living apostles, prophets, elders, bishops, evangelists, pastors, priests, teachers and deacons? Does it teach faith in God, repentance, baptism in water, the laying on of hands, the resurrection and the eternal judgment -- or does it skip some of those as non-essentials? Does it preach a social gospel, or a personal gospel, or both? You are entitled to the FULLNESS of the gospel, You are entitled to belong to a church which brings you not one, or two, or several of the principles of the gospel, but a FULLNESS of the gospel, and a fullness of the ministry of Christ. We invite you to join us in that kind of gospel and that kind of church -- The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.