
Mormon Literature Sampler:

The King Follett Discourse*

Joseph Smith

[The President having arrived, the choir sang a hymn. Elder A. Lyman offered prayer. The President then arose and called the attention of the congregation to the subjects which were contemplated in the forepart of the conference.]

Because the wind blows very hard, it will hardly be possible for me to make you all hear unless I have your profound attention. I approach a matter of the greatest importance and the most solemn of any that can occupy our attention--that is, the subject of the dead. I have been requested to speak by friends and relatives of Brother Follett, who was crushed to death in a well; and inasmuch as there are a great many in this congregation who live in this city as well as elsewhere who have lost friends, I feel disposed to speak on the subject in general and offer you my ideas so far as I have ability and so far as I shall be inspired by the Holy Spirit to dwell on this subject.

I want your prayers and faith, the instruction of Almighty God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, that I may set forth things that are true and easily comprehended and that will carry the testimony to your hearts. Pray that the Lord may strengthen my lungs and stay the winds; let the prayers of the Saints enter into the ear of the Lord of Sabaoth, for the prayers of the righteous availeth much.

Before entering fully into the investigation of the subject, I wish to pave the way with a few preliminaries in order that you may understand everything. I do not intend to please your ears with superfluity of words or oratory or with much learning, but rather to edify you with the simple truths from heaven.

In the first place, I wish to go back to the beginning--to the Creation. That is the starting point if we are to be fully acquainted with the mind, the purposes, and the decrees of the great Elohim who sits in yonder heavens. We must have an understanding of God himself in the beginning. If we start right, it is easy to go right all the time; but if we start wrong, it is a hard matter to get right.

There are very few beings in the world who understand rightly the character of God. They do not comprehend that which is past or that which is to come; and consequently they know but little above the brute beast. If a man learns nothing more than to eat, drink, and sleep and does not comprehend any of the designs of God, he is equal only to the beast, who comprehends the same things: it eats, drinks, sleeps, and knows nothing more; yet it knows as much as we, unless *we* are able to comprehend by the inspiration of Almighty God.

I want to go back to the beginning and so lift your minds into a loftier sphere, a more exalted understanding than what the human mind generally understands. I want to ask this congregation, every man, woman and child, to answer the question in his own heart what kind of a being God is. What kind of a being is God? Does any man or woman know? Have any of you seen him, heard him, communed with him? Here is the question, perhaps, that will from this time forth occupy your attention. The apostle [John] says, "This is life eternal"--to know God and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. If any man, not knowing what kind of a being God is, inquires to know if the declaration of the apostle is true--and searches diligently his own heart--he will admit that he has not eternal life; for there can be no eternal life on any other principle.

My first object is to find out the character of the only wise and true God, and if I should be the man to comprehend him and to explain or convey his principles to your hearts so that the spirit seals it upon you, let every man and woman henceforth put his hand on his mouth and never say anything against the man of God again. But if I fail, it becomes my duty to renounce all my pretensions to revelations and inspirations. And if all [religious teachers] pretend to know God, they will be as bad off as I am, at any rate. There is not a man but who would breathe out an anathema if he knew I was a false prophet....But if any man is authorized to take away my life because he says I am a false teacher, then upon the same principle I am authorized to take away the life of every false teacher, and where would be the end of blood? And who would not be the sufferer? But no man is authorized to take away life because of a difference of religion, which all laws and governments ought to tolerate, right or wrong....

I want you all to know God, to be familiar with him. And if I can bring you to him, all persecutions against me will cease; you will know that I am his servant, for I speak as one having authority. What sort of a being was God in the beginning? Open your ears and hear all ye ends of the earth; for I am going to prove it to you by the Bible, and I am going to tell you the designs of God for the human race and why he interferes with the affairs of man.

First, God himself, who sits enthroned in yonder heaven, is a man like one of you. That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today and you were to see the great God who holds this world in its orbit and upholds all things by his power, you would see him in the image and very form of a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion and image of God. He received instruction from and walked, talked, and conversed with him as one man talks and communes with another.

In order to understand the subject of the dead for the consolation of those who mourn for the loss of their friends, it is necessary they should understand the character and being of God; for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined that God was God from all eternity. [That he was not is an idea] incomprehensible to some. But it is the simple and first principle of the gospel--to know for a certainty the character of God, that we may converse with him as one man with another. God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did, and I will show it from the Bible.

I wish I had the trump of an archangel; I could tell the story in such a manner that persecution would cease forever. What did Jesus say? (Mark it, elder Rigdon!) Jesus said, "As the Father hath power in himself, even so hath the Son power." To do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious--in a manner to lay down his body and take it up again. Jesus, what are you going to do? To lay down my life as my Father did, and take it up again. If you do not believe it, you do not believe the Bible. The scriptures say it, and I defy all the learning and wisdom, all the combined powers of earth and hell together, to refute it.

Here, then, is eternal life--to know the only wise and true God. And you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves--to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done--by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.

And I want you to know that in the last days, while certain individuals are proclaiming his name, God is not trifling with you or me; it is the first principle of consolation. How consoling to the mourner when he is called to part with a husband, wife, father, mother, child, or dear relative, to know that although the earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved that dear one shall rise in immortal glory, not to sorrow, suffer, or die any more but shall be God's heirs and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. What is it? It is to inherit the same glory, the same power, and the same exaltation until you ascend the throne of eternal power the same as those who are gone before. What did Jesus do? Why, I do the things I saw my Father do when worlds came rolling into existence. I saw my Father work out his kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom I shall present it to my Father so that he obtains kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt his glory. And so Jesus treads in his tracks to inherit what God did before. It is plain beyond disputation.

Thus you learn some of the first principles of the gospel, about which so much hath been said. When you climb a ladder, you must begin at the bottom and go on until you learn the last principle; it will be a great while before you have learned the last. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it is a great thing to learn salvation beyond the grave. I suppose I am not allowed to go into an investigation of anything that is not contained in the Bible. And I think there are many "wise men" here who would put me to death for treason; so I shall turn commentator today.

I shall comment on the very first Hebrew word in the Bible, *Berosheit*. I want to analyze the word; *baith*--in, by, through, and everything else. *Rosh*--the head. *Sheit*--grammatical termination. When the inspired man wrote it, he did not put the *baith* there. A man, a Jew without any authority, thought it too bad to begin to talk about the head. It read first, "The head one of the Gods brought forth the Gods"; that is the true meaning of the words. *Baurau* signifies to bring forth. If you do not believe it, you do not believe the learned man of God. No man can teach you more than what I have told you. Thus the head God brought forth the Gods in the grand council. I will simplify it in the English language. Oh, ye lawyers and ye doctors who have persecuted me, I want to let you know that the Holy Ghost knows something as well as you do. The head God called together the Gods, and they sat in grand council. The grand councilors sat in yonder heavens and contemplated the creation of the worlds that were created at that time. When I say doctors and lawyers, I mean the doctors and lawyers of the scripture. I have done so hitherto to let the lawyers flutter and everybody laugh at them. Some learned doctor might take a notion to say, "The scriptures say thus and so and are not to be altered." But I am going to show you an error. I have an old book of the New Testament in the Hebrew, Latin, German, and Greek. I have been reading the German and find it to be the most [nearly] correct, and to correspond nearest to the revelations I have given for the last fourteen years. It tells about Jachobod the son of Zebedee. It means Jacob. In the English New Testament it is translated James. Now if Jacob had the keys, you might talk about James through all eternity and never get the keys. In the 21st verse of the fourth chapter of Matthew, the German edition gives the word Jacob instead of James. How can we escape the damnation of hell except God reveal to us? Men bind us with chains. Latin says Jachobod means Jacob; Hebrew says it means Jacob; Greek says Jacob; German says Jacob. I thank God I have got this book, and I thank him more for the gift of the Holy Ghost. I have the oldest book in the world, but I have the oldest book in my heart. I have all the four testaments. Come here, ye learned men, and read if you can. I should not have introduced this testimony were it not to back up the word *Rosh*, the head, Father of the Gods. I should not have brought it up except to show that I am right.

When we begin to learn in this way, we begin to learn the only true God and what kind of a being we have got to worship. When we know how to come to him, he begins to unfold the heavens to us and tell us all about it. When we are ready to come to him, he is ready to come to us.

Now I ask all who hear me why the learned men who are preaching salvation say that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. The reason is they are unlearned. They account it blasphemy to contradict the idea; they will call you a fool....The Holy Ghost within me comprehends more than all the world, and I will associate with him. The word create came from the word *baurau*; it does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize, the same as a man would organize materials to build a ship. Hence we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos--chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time He had. The pure principles of element are principles that can never be destroyed; they may be organized and reorganized but not destroyed.

I have another subject to dwell upon. It is impossible for me to say everything I would like to say about it, but I shall touch upon it; time will not permit me to say all. I am referring to the resurrection of the dead--that is, the soul, the mind of man, the immortal spirit. All men say God created it in the beginning. The very idea lessens man in my estimation. I do not believe the doctrine; I know better. Hear it all ye ends of the world, for God has told me so. Before I get through, I will make a man appear a fool if he doesn't believe it. I am going to tell of things more noble.

We say that God himself is a self-existing God. Who told you so? It is correct enough, but how did it get into your heads? Who told you that man did not exist in like manner upon the same principles? (Refers to the old Bible.) How does it read in the Hebrew? It doesn't say so in the Hebrew; it says God made man out of the earth and put into him Adam's spirit, and so he became a living body.

The mind of man is as immortal as God himself. I know that my testimony is true; hence, when I talk to these mourners, what have they lost? Their friends and relatives are separated from their bodies for only a short season; their spirits existed coequal with God, and they now exist in a place where they converse together, the same as we do on the earth. Is it logic to say that a spirit is immortal and yet has a beginning? Because if a spirit has a beginning, it will have an end. That is good logic. I *want* to reason further on the spirit of man, for I am dwelling on the spirit and body of man--on the subject of the dead. I take my ring from my finger and liken it unto the mind of man, the immortal spirit, because it has no beginning. Suppose I cut it in two; as the Lord lives, because it has a beginning, it would have an end. All the fools and learned and wise men from the beginning of creation who say that man had a beginning prove that he must have an end. If that were so, the doctrine of annihilation would be true. But if I am right, I might with boldness proclaim from the house tops that God never did have power to create the spirit of man at all. God himself could not create himself. Intelligence exists upon a self-existent principle; it is a spirit from age to age, and there is no creation about it. Moreover, all the spirits that God ever *sent* into the world are susceptible to enlargement.

The first principles of man are self-existent with God. God found himself in the midst of spirits and glory, and because he was greater, he saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have the privilege of advancing like himself--that they might have one glory upon another and all the knowledge, power, and glory necessary to save the world of spirits. I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life that are given to me, you taste them, and I know you believe them. You say honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life; I know it is good. And when I tell you of these things that were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and I rejoice more and more.

I want to talk more of the relation of man to God. I will open your eyes in relation to your dead. All things whatsoever God in his infinite wisdom sees proper to reveal to us while we are dwelling in mortality in regard to our mortal bodies are revealed to us in the abstract--independent of affinity to this mortal tabernacle--revealed to us as if we had no bodies at all. And those revelations which will save our dead will save our bodies; God reveals them to us in view of no eternal dissolution of the body. Hence the responsibility, the awful responsibility, that rests upon us in relation to our dead; for all the spirits who have not obeyed the gospel in the flesh must either obey it in the spirit or be damned. Solemn thought; dreadful thought. Is there nothing to be done? No salvation for our fathers and friends who have died and not obeyed the decrees of the Son of Man? Would to God that I had forty days and nights to tell you everything! I would let you know that I am not a fallen prophet.

What kind of characters are those who can be saved although their bodies are decaying in the grave? When his commandments teach us, it is in view of eternity. The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us is to seek after our dead. The apostle says, "They without us cannot be made perfect" [Hebrews 11:40]. Now I will speak of them: I say to you Paul, you cannot be perfect without us. It is necessary that those who have gone before and those who will come after us should have salvation in common with us, and thus hath God made it obligatory to man. Hence God said he should send Elijah.

I have a declaration to make as to the provisions which God hath made to suit the conditions of man-made from before the foundation of the world. What has Jesus said? All sins and all blasphemies, every transgression, except one, that man can be guilty of may be forgiven either in this world or the world to come. Hence God hath made a provision, that every spirit in the eternal world can be ferreted out and saved unless he has committed that unpardonable sin, which cannot be remitted to him. God has wrought out a salvation for all men, unless they have committed a certain sin. Every man who has a friend in the eternal world can save him unless he has committed the unpardonable sin, and so you can see how far you can be a savior. A

man cannot commit the unpardonable sin after the dissolution of the body, and there is a way possible for escape. Knowledge saves a man, and in the world of spirits a man cannot be exalted except by knowledge. So long as a man will not give heed to the commandments, he must abide without salvation. A man is his own tormenter and his own condemner. Hence the saying, "They shall go into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone." The torment of the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone. So is the torment of man.

I know the scriptures; I understand them. I said that no man can commit the unpardonable sin after the dissolution of the body, but he must do it in this world. Hence the salvation of Jesus Christ was wrought out for all men in order to triumph over the devil; for if it did not catch him in one place, it would in another, for he stood up as a Savior.

The contention in heaven was this: Jesus said there would be certain souls that would not be saved, and the devil said he could save them all. The grand council gave in for Jesus Christ. So the devil rebelled against God and fell, with all who put up their heads for him.

All sins shall be forgiven except the sin against the Holy Ghost. After a man has sinned against the Holy Ghost there is no repentance for him. He has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it. He has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been open to him. And from that time he begins to be an enemy to this work, like many of the apostates of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When a man begins to be an enemy, he hunts me; he seeks to kill me; he thirsts for my blood; he never ceases. He has the same spirit of them who crucified the Lord of Life--the same spirit that sins against the Holy Ghost. You cannot bring him to repentance. Awful is the consequence.

I advise all of you to be careful what you do, or by-and-by you may find that you have been deceived. Stay yourselves; do not give way. You may find that someone has laid a snare for you. Be cautious; await! When you find a spirit that wants bloodshed--murder--the same is not of God but is of the devil. Out of the abundance of the heart a man speaketh. The man that tells you words of life is the man who can save you. I warn you against all evil characters who sin against the Holy Ghost, for there is no redemption for them in this world or in the world to come.

I can enter into the mysteries; I can enter largely into the eternal worlds. For Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many mansions." Paul says, "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars." We have reason to have the greatest hope and consolation for our dead, for we have aided them in the first principles; we have seen them walk in our midst and have seen them sink asleep in the arms of Jesus. And hence is the glory of the sun.

You mourners have occasion to rejoice [speaking of the death of Elder King Follett] for your husband and father is gone to wait until the resurrection; and your expectations and hopes are far above what man can conceive. For why has God revealed it to us? I am authorized to say by the authority of the Holy Ghost that you have no occasion to fear, for he is gone to the home of the just. Don't mourn; don't weep. I know it by the testimony of the Holy Ghost that is within me. Rejoice O Israel! your friends shall triumph gloriously, while their murderers shall welter for ages. I say this for the benefit of strangers. I have a father, brothers, and friends who are gone to a world of spirits. They are absent for only a moment.

They are in the spirit; and when we depart, we shall hail our mothers, fathers, friends, and all whom we love. There will be no fear of mobs, but all will be an eternity of felicity.

Mothers, you shall have your children, for they shall have eternal life. Their debt is paid; no damnation awaits them, for they are in the spirit....

In the German, the text bears me out the same as the revelations which I have given for the last fourteen

years. I have the testimony to put in their teeth; my testimony has been true all the time. You will find it in the declaration of John the Baptist [reads from the German]. John says, "I baptize you with water, but when Jesus comes, who has the power, he shall administer the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost." Where is now all the sectarian world? And if this testimony is true, they are all damned as clearly as anathema can do it. I know the text is true. I call upon all you Germans who know that it is true to say aye. [Loud shouts of "Aye."]

Alexander Campbell, how are you going to save them with water alone? For John said his baptism was nothing without the baptism of Jesus Christ. There is one God, one Father, one Jesus, one hope of our calling, one baptism (all these three baptisms only make one). I have the truth and am at the defiance of the world to contradict me if they can. I have now preached a little Latin, a little Hebrew, Greek, and German; and I have fulfilled all. I am not so big a fool as many have taken me to be. The Germans know that I read the German correctly.

Hear it all ye ends of the earth--all ye sinners, repent! Repent! Turn to God, for your religion won't save you, and you will be damned. I do not say how long, but those who sin against the Holy Ghost cannot be forgiven in this world or in the world to come; they shall die the second death. As they concoct scenes of bloodshed in this world, so they shall rise to that resurrection which is as the lake of fire and brimstone. Some shall rise to the everlasting burning of God, and some shall rise to the damnation of their own filthiness--as exquisite as the lake of fire and brimstone.

I have intended my remarks for all, both rich and poor, bond and free, great and small. I have no enmity against any man. I love you all. I am your best friend, and if persons miss their mark, it is their own fault. If I reprove a man and he hates me, he is a fool; for I love all men, especially these my brethren and sisters. I rejoice in hearing the testimony of my aged friends. You never knew my heart; no man knows my history; I cannot tell it. I shall never undertake it. If I had not experienced what I have, I should not have believed it myself. I never did harm any man since I have been born into the world. My voice is always for peace, I cannot lie down until all my work is finished. I never think any evil nor do anything to the harm of my fellowman. When I am called at the trump of the archangel and weighed in the balance, you will all know me then. I add no more. God bless you all. Amen.

[The choir sang a hymn at half past five o'clock and dismissed with a benediction.]

*This sermon, important for its startling new doctrine regarding the nature of God, was reported by Willard Richards, Wilford Woodruff, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton and was first published in the *Times and Seasons*, 5 (15 August 1844): 612-17. Obvious errors in punctuation and sentence structure have been edited.

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