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REMARKS

By Elder EZRA T. BENSON, Tabernacle, Saturday Morning, April 6, 1861.

[REPORTED BY J. V. LONG.]

I feel truly thankful, brethren and sisters, for the opportunity I enjoy this morning. I trust that we have come together with prayerful hearts, before the Lord our God, that his spirit may be upon us, and that our prayers and all our devotions during this Conference may be acceptable in his sight. If I understand my duty as an Elder in Israel, this should be my object and my desire not only in coming to Conference meetings, but also in all my associations with the people of God. I feel well in beholding your faces, and in having the privilege which I now enjoy of standing before you; I feel that it is a blessed opportunity, and one that should be appreciated by us all. We have the privilege twice in each year of coming up to head quarters to visit the First Presidency and leading authorities of the Church in G. S. L. City, and inasmuch as we have come with pure hearts and clean hands we shall all have confidence before God and his people who reside here; our anticipations will be realized; we shall receive such instructions and counsels from our brethren who are called to preside over us, as will be for our best good.

I do not feel competent to teach this people, hence I merely rise to bear my testimony to the truth of the gospel of the Son of God. I testify that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of the Most High, that he was a minister of life to the nations, that he revealed the will of the Father concerning his Sons and Daughters, that many of the revelations which he gave concerning this nation, have already been fulfilled, and that others are being fulfilled before our eyes. I know that he revealed the future destiny of all the nations of the earth, and his predictions are being fulfilled to the joy and satisfaction of every Latter Day Saint, and there is no doubt upon our minds in regard to those that are still unfulfilled.—Then what shall I do? Shall I cease to bear any further testimony, or shall I continue to aver the truth of the gospel we have espoused and the teachings we have received from Presidents Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball and Daniel H. Wells? Yes; these counsels and teachings have been just as good, just as true as the counsels and revelations given by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

I now want to ask you a question: what more do you want? What greater things can you ask for than those gifts and endowments which you have received? If we have rejected, or treated coolly and walked underfoot the blessings of the Almighty, remember that we are on the devil's ground.

While some are groveling in the dark, drying up in the things of God, and striving to lead into other channels, and doing that which will gratify their own corrupt dispositions, we should be endeavoring to increase in the light and knowledge of the truth, and to set an example that is worthy of all imitation.

Seeing that I have been called upon to make a few remarks, I feel disposed to take for my text, LATTER DAY SAINT. If you take up the character of an Elder in Israel, one who has received the gospel in humility, been ordained to the Holy Priesthood because of his faithfulness, who has preached to the nations of the earth, borne a faithful testimony to the truth of our holy religion, what more do you want? What more can you ask in proof of that man's integrity? Do we want to search in the kingdoms of this world for any other testimony than that which we have received? No, neither do we want to inquire, except in the household of faith, respecting the character of our brethren. The very moment that a man lets go his testimony and the spirit of his religion, where is his faith and where is his power? It passes into the shade; the testimony first given is laid by, and it is put aside; his faith, his wisdom and the power to receive something else; and the vacuum is filled up with darkness. Is not a man in that situation a suitable subject for the devil to work upon? Yes; he is. Having set aside the gospel, closed up the channel of light and the medium through which he received intelligence, he cannot comprehend the things of eternity; he has turned his attention to something else, gone after other Gods, become subject to other spirits, from which he receives dreams and visions that gradually lead him on to destruction.

If we who profess to be Saints expect to keep the light of Heaven within us, and the candle of the Almighty shining round about us, we must hold fast the beginning of our confidence and strive to increase in the principles of life and salvation.

If I were to go and pray to another God, I should expect that he would give me revelation to suit his own purpose, and that he would lead me out of the path in which I am now striving to walk; he would lead me away from the true and living God, and he would lead me into doubt and darkness.

If we are led by the spirit of the true and living God, we are always led aright; we are always happy, always cheerful, we rejoice evermore and pray without ceasing. We need not fear in regard to the gospel of Jesus Christ, for it is as true to-day as it was when we first heard it. We have more light, more faith, more knowledge, and consequently more power than we ever had before, and God has just as much right, and he is just as willing to reveal his will unto us as he was twenty years ago.

Let us be prayerful, let us cleanse our hearts from every impurity, and sanctify ourselves before our heavenly father, and we shall surely win the prize, but we cannot upon any other condition. This is the promise made to us by the Elders who brought the gospel to our doors. We were told to cultivate brotherly kindness, virtue and charity; we were told to nourish and cherish the spirit of wisdom, and to be constantly striving to add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity; and we were told that, if these things were in us, we should neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

May God bless us all, and enable us to do these things in my earnest prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ: Amen.

REMARKS

By Pres. Daniel H. Wells, Tabernacle, Saturday morning, April 6, 1861.

[REPORTED BY J. V. LONG.]

The text taken by br. Benson, I think, is a very good one, and he has portrayed before us what is necessary to enable us to be one in following out those virtues and principles which are Godlike, and which are calculated to make us one, that we also may become like God. This is our duty and our privilege—to be Godlike in our ways, to imitate the virtuous, the true and the good, and in as much as it is possible, to become ultimately as pure and holy as our Father and God.—This is the privilege of the human race in our day and generation. We have the light of revelation to guide the souls of men aright, to make ourselves like our Father in heaven.

We have not known these things until within the last few years, since the revelation of the fulness of the gospel. It is one of the greatest privileges and blessings ever made known to man! Clothed with the light of truth and knowledge from the heavens, having a channel of communication opened up through which we get intelligence from the Father of light, with whom there is no variableness nor the least shadow of turning. This light and knowledge has been imparted to the children of men, and by obedience to its directions they can make themselves like Gods in the eternal worlds. What beauty, what love, what greatness and power, and what exceeding great glory lie before the true hearted Saint! Let your minds open up to behold in vision the greatness thereof for the moment that you can see what light, greatness and glory are strewn in and now illuminate your pathway to cheer you onward through the shifting and varied scenes of life, to the haven of bliss and glory hereafter, continually enlightening your minds, solacing you through life, enabling you to overcome every difficulty which you may have to encounter in life's journey.

As sorrow and distress are in the world we expect that every one will, more or less, have to drink of the bitter cup. This light, these great gifts, this promise of reward, of happiness and exaltation, the lovely principles which are unfolded to our view, are enough to inspire in the human heart, every day, joy that could not be conceived of by the natural man.

As was asked by br. Benson, what more could we ask to prove to ourselves that this is the work of the Almighty? What more could we have to induce us to pursue the right way? Still how little are these blessings appreciated by the world at large. Yes, and by the Saints of the Most High, in comparison with what they should be! It seems as though we often forget what our real blessings are, and thereby let darkness creep into our minds and cover up the little light that is in us. We should remember that our religion is designed to redeem a lost world from sin, from the bondage of iniquity and also from the rule and thralldom of Satan, which have enveloped it for generations, and covered it as it were with a thick pall, and well nigh desolated the earth. It is designed now to restore it to and place it in the light, to fill it with intelligence and sanctify it through the truth. Our religion teaches us to draw wisdom from the fountain of wisdom, and to extend it to the minds of others, it opens up to its adherents every privilege which the heart of a righteous man can desire, and it leads on the faithful to glory and honor in worlds of light.

But what is the reverse? What is the other side of the picture? It is confusion, distress of communities, division in families, distress of nations, a fearful looking forward into the future because of the judgments of the Almighty, which they apprehend are near at their doors. Have they any desire to do any better? No; but the wicked are striving to see how they can get more advantages over their neighbor, and thus do worse and serve the devil better, and almost with railroad speed, that they may see wickedness predominate throughout the length and breadth of the land. The conduct of the wicked leads to darkness and misery in the present as well as in the future.

How thankful then we should be that this gospel and the light of revelation have reached our minds, and caused our bosoms to vibrate with the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. The welcome sound and accompanying power has plucked us as brands from the burning. Then do you not feel thankful that we have this blessed privilege, and that we had understanding enough left with us when this gospel reached our ears to embrace it? It has been the privilege of the world to do the same, our cotemporaries in all nations have the opportunity of becoming acquainted with its blessings. The light of this gospel has been shed forth more or less among all nations of the globe, thousands and millions have heard it, but many only to reject it, because of the pride of life and the lust of the world. Friends and relatives who have dared to differ in opinion with their connections, and to join themselves to an unpopular people, have found that it has cost them their name in society, their character among their fellows, their fortune and all they possessed. This view having been taken of it by many who have examined its principles, has caused them to reject it.

It is the privilege of the people of this nation, as much so as it has been ours to receive the benefits of this gospel; it is also the privilege of our government to do good to this people; but it is left with them to act according to the dictates of their own consciences. It is not only their privilege, but it is their duty to foster this kingdom, and it was one of the main objects of the government, in laying the whole structure thereof, that it should afford succor and support to the kingdom of God. It was the wish of the Almighty that the principles of liberty and of righteousness should underlie the flag of the Union, and the institutions that flow from that government. Who could dare to question the rights of conscience, was a question often asked in revolutionary times. How has the government of our country performed that important duty towards this people. We only need refer to our past history to answer this question. It ignored the privilege that we claimed, and refused to do its duty. That neglect on the part of our government caused thousands to be ruined, to be driven forth into the trackless wilds, and for want of ordinary subsistence many weakened and died. The wilful neglect of our government caused the best blood of this generation to be shed; it caused hundreds to die through exposure, and in every respect it has failed to come out and maintain the rights of conscience towards the Saints of the Most High. It would have been far better for us if we had had no pretensions to government at all, than for it thus to have encouraged the hand of the plunderer and of the murderer, we should have fared much better than we did; to say nothing of their finally concentrating their power and their influence to wipe us out of existence, after we had gained a foothold in these dreary deserts.

Then so far as we are concerned we should have been better without a government than with such an one. It is a principle in political economy that no government shall be bound together any longer than it is good for its subjects. Whenever any government fails to protect and preserve the rights and interests of its people, they can no longer be expected to render unto it their allegiance and support; hence we see the people occasionally shaking off the chains of tyranny that bind them.—Through all this abuse and neglect, on the part of the present government, this people has shown the most devoted loyalty, and they never have breathed a word, or exhibited a desire to throw it off. When administered in its legitimate channel, it is one of the best governments upon the face of the whole earth, and if it had been used for the purposes for which it was originally designed, it would have been both stronger and better.

We find no fault with its institutions, neither do we particularly object to its form of government, but it is its administration, and the way its institutions and laws have been abused. The way it is now, and has for years past been administered, has founded the cause of complaint. It recognizes the principle of self government, that the people have the right to control. Of that principle we have long been apprized, but it has never been extended to us as a people. Through the arts

and plans of politicians they have managed to deprive territories of that which is given to the States. This is contrary to the genius of the Constitution which gives the people the right to choose their own rulers; taxation should only be exacted where representation is allowed. These privileges have been withheld from this as well as from other territories, and the pattern given for this Territory in the organic act, is not materially different from any other. Our offence has been that we have asked for those of our own choosing to rule us. It has been the case, it is true, that they have chosen persons from the States to hold offices in all the territories, and ostensibly they have made no difference, but this should be considered, that the appointing power has given others the opportunity of making known their preference and such wishes have generally been considered, with the exception of the people of this Territory.

I am now speaking of the past; hitherto it has been as I have now mentioned. This government has been partial in this and in many other respects, and has no real claim upon our affections, but still we seek to preserve those institutions, and to keep sacred those wise provisions which are embodied in the Constitution as it was formed by our fathers; and perhaps we are the only people that do seek the salvation of our country at the present time, and it will finally be shown that we are the only people that will stand by its principles, and make it what it was intended to be—an asylum for the oppressed of all nations!

It is truly a strange crisis to which the country has now arrived. It is something like a statement I saw the other day; very truly depicted, though very humiliating to receive, to be compared with an old rotten government like that of Austria; a government naturally crumbling to pieces, a government notorious for its oppression of its subjects for many generations. Another and a new one that has not yet attained its full size, presents the same picture to the enlightened world; it also is crumbling to pieces from the same cause—corruption from the centre to the circumference. I do not think there is a more corrupt government upon the face of the earth. It seems that when they commenced their war upon us, they commenced to glide the downward road to destruction.

It is patent everywhere that the government does not look for anything from their public servants but corruption and robbery; they settle all their accounts with this understanding of the subject—and the whole machinery has become corrupt in the sight of heaven and all good men.

In departing from the principles of truth, of life and mercy, in rejecting the message of salvation that has been sent to them, through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the Most High God, who was chosen to open up the work of this last dispensation, they paved the way for their own destruction. They have rolled up against this people in their wrath and in their hatred, and have striven to destroy the priesthood from the earth; we now begin to see the results. In the days of our tribulations they said to the mobs, "Go on;" yes, they encouraged our enemies in the perpetration of all their abominable acts. The Prophet of the Lord spoke and told them they should have mobs to their hearts satisfaction, but it should be among themselves; one state against another until the whole land should be deluged with the blood of its inhabitants.

When our people applied to the government to compel the State of Missouri to restore us to our lands, they pretended they could not interfere with a sovereign State, and as a reward for their conduct, they have now got State sovereignty to their hearts content; and this will continue to be poured back upon them; they will have to walk in the road which they laid out for us, and that which they would have put upon us, is now fast coming upon their own heads. What more striking illustration could be brought to bear upon the minds of this people? What course could the Lord pursue that would seem to satisfy mankind that these are his people and that this is his work, than that which is being daily acted before all the world? It is as was said of old, this work is as a light set upon a hill. This cause and kingdom are a living, perpetual and final testimony to the nations that God is with us, though we be despised by the world.

The wicked reject this gospel and this message from the Almighty, which is given in much mercy for their salvation. The fault must rest upon their own heads; they have certainly been warned time and again. They live in the time of final warning, and they begin to feel the re-action which is coming upon them. They have sent forth their thunder bolts against the Lord's anointed ones, and the rebound is beginning to take effect upon their own heads. It does seem to me that, if they were honest, they would acknowledge this, but we do not expect them to do it at the present time.