

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

ELDER WILFORD WOODRUFF,*At the General Conference, Thursday Morning, Oct. 7th, 1880.*

REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

I AM pleased to have the opportunity of again meeting with my brethren and sisters in General Conference. There is one thing that is very clear to my mind with regard to myself and everybody else who attempts to teach the Latter-day Saints, and that is we all need the spirit of the Lord, and without it we cannot edify anybody, neither can we build up Zion or do the work of God without the Holy Spirit. The prophets, the apostles, and all men who have been called in every age of the world to labor for the kingdom of God have had to be actuated by this principle, and that is one reason, as Brother Carrington has said, why the weak things of this world, whom the Lord has chosen, have confidence in God to go forth to lift up their voices and preach the gospel of Christ and do the work which is required at their hands.

It is certainly interesting to any reflecting mind to contemplate the dealings of God with the inhabitants of the earth in the various ages and dispensations almost from the creation of the world as far as we have any knowledge. I have often been struck, in reading ancient history, with the dealings of God with some of the ancient cities of which we have some account in the Bible and other histories aside from that book. For instance there is Tyre and Sodom, Nineveh and Babylon the great—these mighty cities that were built as it were to defy all time and all power but God himself. Just as quick as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, or any other prophet whom God raised up to lift up his voice and declare the word of the Lord concerning the destiny of any of these cities, all the power of Nebuchadnezzar and Balthazar, or any other king or priest who dwelt in these cities, ruled them, governed and controlled them, had no power to stay the fulfillment of the words of the servants of the Lord; these cities have been overturned, have been laid in the dust in fulfillment of the word of God whenever they were ripened in iniquity. The Lord sent a poor weak man named Jonah to Nineveh, a great and mighty city, to go and warn the inhabitants thereof to repent, or in forty days Nineveh should be overthrown. Jonah thought it was a little too much for him, an obscure man, to go unto a great city like Nineveh and tell the inhabitants that in a few days the city would be overturned, hence he fled into Tarshish. For this he had a peculiar kind of experience for three days and three nights; you are all acquainted with the history that I allude to. When Jonah, however, got on dry land again he went and fulfilled his mission to the inhabitants of Nineveh. And I have many times thought that if this generation was like unto the Ninevites the world would be different to what it is today. When the people heard the word of God they believed it. They went to work and repented and called upon the Lord, and we are told "that God withheld the evil that he had said he would do unto them; and he did it." But I want to say that in all these things, when the Lord has called upon men to labor in the building up of his kingdom, he has chosen the weak things of the world. And so it has been throughout the whole generations of men. In the days of Jesus Christ, the apostles chosen were illiterate men, fishermen a good many of them; but the Lord gave them the apostleship, he gave them the priesthood, and they were commanded to go forth and preach the gospel. But they had to suffer death for their testimony.

I desire now to refer to ourselves. In reflecting upon ancient days, let us look at our own position. The Lord raised up Joseph Smith. His history—his life, his works, his death—is before the world to-day. Joseph Smith was an illiterate man, as far as worldly learning was concerned, but he was an instrument raised up by the Lord to lay the foundation of this great and last dispensation. The Lord held Joseph Smith responsible for the keys of the kingdom of God, for the revelations of heaven, for every principle which the Lord had revealed to him. Joseph Smith was a great man—that is before the Lord,

before the heavens, and before this generation. He was ordained of God to lay the foundation of this Church and Kingdom; he was true and faithful unto death, and when we look at what has followed the laying of the foundation of this Church fifty years ago, with six members, it is a marvel, it is a mystery in the eyes of the world, and it is even to us as Latter-day Saints, to note the progress of this church and kingdom from that day until the present. The revelations which have been given through the Prophet Joseph Smith, as recorded in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, have all had their fulfillment as far as time would admit. Joseph Smith lived until he laid the foundation of this church and kingdom; he lived until he received every key and principle and priesthood which belongs to this dispensation, and he lived until he sealed the same upon the heads of other men. Every man that ever knew him, every elder or every saint of God that ever traveled with him, or have heard him converse, can form some little idea of the spirit that filled his bosom. I have seen him from time to time, in my early acquaintance with him in Kirtland, smite his breast and say, "I would to God I could unbosom my feelings to my friends." But he could not do it. It seems it was impossible for him to reveal to the elders what God had revealed to him. Nevertheless he accomplished the work to which he had been ordained and set apart by the power of God. He lived, as I have already said, until he organized the church in all its various organizations. He chose the apostles, sevens, high council, high priests, and all the various officers in the church and kingdom of God, by revelation, and when he had finished this work, the Lord called him home. He sealed his testimony with his blood, and went to the other side of the veil. He holds the keys of the kingdom of God on both sides of the veil, and will hold them to the endless ages of eternity. Apostles were called and set apart to carry on the work which he commenced. Many of them who were associated with him have passed away, others remain here in the flesh.

If I could tell you the feelings of my own heart I would say to the apostles, sevens, high priests, and all the officers of this Church and kingdom, the God of heaven has raised you up, according to my faith and my view, and placed you here on the earth and watched over you until you have received the ordinances of the gospel. You are raised up as a kingdom of priests. You hold the power of the priesthood in your hands, and I say you are held responsible before high heaven, before the rods of eternity, before the heavenly hosts, and will be held accountable to the judgment day for the manner you make use of this priesthood and power which is put into your hands. This is the conclusion of all of us from the apostles down through every department of this church and kingdom. There never was a generation since God made the world that have had greater power, greater responsibilities, greater blessings, or that have ever had the kingdom of God placed upon their shoulders to remain on the earth until the coming of the Son of Man. Therefore, how great the responsibility resting upon us as apostles, as elders, and in every capacity in which we are called to act. This is the way I view our position, and when I have enjoyed a portion of the spirit of God, when the vision of my mind has been open to comprehend in any measure our relationship to God and the heavenly hosts, and the responsibility we are under here to the Lord and to this generation, I have felt that I would to God that the veil might be lifted to the vision of the Latter-day Saints, that we might see ourselves as God sees us, as the heavenly hosts see us. If we could only comprehend this we would feel in many respects different to what we do at present. We would be diligent. We would not have our hearts set on the things of this life as they many times are. Our labors are very great, very extensive. The Lord requires of us that which he has hardly ever required of any other generation. We have the kingdom. We have got to establish it and maintain it by faith and good works with the help of God while we dwell here in the flesh. We have these temples to build here in these valleys of the mountains. This is one of the most important branches of the responsibility resting upon Latter-day Saints—the redemption of our dead.

I have often referred to this subject, because my mind has been opened to it, my desires have been exercised upon this principle. Nearly 1800 years have passed away and over 50 generations of men who have never seen a Prophet or an Apostle, who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, have gone into the spirit world. They have gone there without the gospel, they are under no responsibility to that law because they never came under it. There are therefore some fifty thousand million people to-day in the spirit world that have to be preached to by the Elders of Israel. There was nobody to preach to them until Joseph Smith went into the spirit world with the keys of the kingdom of God and unlocked the prison door. The Prophet Joseph had this subject of the redemption of the dead in his heart until the day of his death. He labored most diligently to this end. These millions will be preached to, and many will receive the truth, while those who dwell in the flesh have this duty to perform as their descendants on the earth to go and build these temples that we may attend to ordinances for the dead which the dead cannot attend to themselves. God requires this at our hands. It is our duty to enter into these temples and redeem our dead as far as we can, that we may be justified when we go into the spirit world. We have all the branches, temporal and spiritual, of this Church and kingdom to carry out. We have got to build these cities, towns and villages. We have got to cultivate the earth, educate our children, train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and it is our duty as a people to unite ourselves together according to the law of God. We should not set our hearts too much upon the things of this world. The earth and the riches thereof is the Lord's. He will give them to the Latter-day Saints as fast as they are prepared to receive them. But I tell you I have thought many times that it is a calamity for a man to become rich in the midst of this people. It is a hard matter for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. Men when they are poor can labor for their bread and feel thankful to the God who gives it; but when we become millionaires our hearts begin to set upon the things of this world. Not but what such men may keep the commandments of God, do what is right and be justified. I do not make these remarks because I wish to speak against the wealthy of the Latter-day Saints, or anybody else, but I speak of this that we should not permit our hearts to be set upon riches to deprive us of magnifying our calling before the Lord. We have got to become rich, some time or other; the Saints of God will yet possess the earth. But the Lord holds us responsible as a people for the building up of his kingdom. We have got to build these temples and redeem our dead. We have got to pay our tithing. This is a law which has been given unto us. We should obey the law of tithing as a people, so that we may be qualified to inherit eternal life.

When I come to realize that my destiny on the other side of the veil depends upon the little time I have to spend here, I feel that I have no time to throw away. We should seek for the Holy Spirit. We should magnify our calling. This kingdom given unto you Latter-day Saints, is the kingdom of God. It is the kingdom that Daniel saw, it is the everlasting kingdom which has been spoken of by all the holy prophets since the world was made. The little stone cut out of the mountains without hands, will roll until it fills the whole earth. The heavenly hosts are looking to nobody else upon the footstool of God but the Latter-day Saints to accomplish this work. No other people have got the kingdom. No other people have received the priesthood but the Latter-day Saints, and we will be held responsible for the use we make of it. Therefore, I think we should be diligent, we should be faithful to our duties, we should look to the position which we occupy before the Lord. Our blessings are great. The revelations of heaven have been given unto us. We possess the Holy Ghost, it has been given to this people. We have been gathered by it from among the nations of the earth through the instrumentality of weak and humble men who have been called upon to preach the gospel. We regard this as being one of the strongest evidences of this being the work of God. The world, however, hate us. This we regard as another evidence of the divinity of this work. Said

the Savior in his day, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." The world hate this people, the priests of the day especially, and if they had the power they would waste them away from "off" the face of the earth; but the Lord has said that he would break in pieces every weapon that is formed against Zion. When the wicked stretch out their hands to destroy this kingdom of God, will they prevail? I think not. We have got the kingdom of God. The Lord is looking to us, Joseph Smith and the whole of the spirit world, who are righteous, are watching this people with intense interest. They expect us to build Zion. They expect us to build temples and redeem our dead. They expect us to unite ourselves together and to keep the faith and overcome the world, the flesh and the devil. They expect these things at our hands, and I do hope that they may not be disappointed.

We have every encouragement, my brethren and sisters, to be faithful. I thank God I have heard this gospel. I thank God I have lived to see this people. I thank God that I have been associated with prophets and apostles. All the happiness, all the joy and all the consolation I have ever had has been since I embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ. I have a testimony for myself, as you have for yourselves, that this is the work of God. I know it is the work of God. I know Joseph Smith was a prophet of the Lord. The Lord raised him up to lay the foundation of this Church and Kingdom. No man could do it of himself. The voice of God, the voice of the Holy Ghost, the voice of inspiration has declared these things from day to day and from year to year. It is by this power that we have been gathered together. Who could have gathered this people by any other principle only by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Where is there a minister on the face of the earth—a minister of the gospel or one who professes to be such—who dare go to the nations of the earth and tell the people that if they receive his testimony and will go forth and be baptized, they shall receive the Holy Ghost? Is there any man on the earth dare do this? No one. No people ever has done it excepting the Latter-day Saints. Why dare they not do this? Because God would not back up their testimony, and if we had not been called of God, if this gospel had not been of God, we should have been found out a great many years ago. When we go and declare these things we promise the sons and daughters of Adam that if they will receive the gospel of Christ they shall receive the Holy Ghost. We offer this in the name of Israel's God. We baptize men and women, we lay hands upon them, and they do receive the Holy Ghost, and it bears record to them and they rise up and bear testimony of the truth of these things. It is by this power we have been gathered. It is by this power we shall build up Zion. We shall continue to labor. We shall prosper. We shall have power to build these temples and dedicate them. We shall have power to build others and will continue this work until the Son of Man comes in the clouds of heaven to reward every man according to the deeds done in the body. Then let us as Elders of Israel round up your shoulders for the kingdom of God. Let us strive to retain the Holy Spirit that we may realize our responsibility and be ready to magnify our calling and do our duty before the Lord.

I pray God my Heavenly Father to let his blessing rest upon us during this conference—upon Brother Taylor, the Apostles, the Elders of Israel, and those who teach us and instruct us, for Christ's sake, Amen.

A Fond du Lac accommodation train on the Northwestern road was thrown from the track near Milton Junction, Wis., yesterday, the passenger car going down an embankment. Six persons injured.

The Commercial House, at the corner of Sumner and Depot streets, North Adams, Mass., was destroyed by fire this morning. About 30 boarders were in the house, nearly all of whom suffered the loss of clothing, while some lost all their furniture. The domestics escaped in their night clothing.

THE PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY.

ST. GEORGE, Dec. 24th, 1880.

Editor Deseret News:

Yesterday was a day long to be remembered, one which all Israel should recollect with joy and gratitude. And indeed it was so remembered here publicly. A seventies meeting was convened at 2 o'clock p. m. in the Tabernacle to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith, presided over by President Jacob Gates, Presidents Herriman and Hancock being unable to attend. After singing, prayer was offered by Elder Milo Andrus. Elder Jacob Gates made a few remarks, of an introductory nature. He alluded to the birth of the Savior in the meridian of time, at which the morning stars sang together, and if the morning stars rejoiced at the coming of our Savior, so might the stars of evening rejoice, when the evening of this world was lit by the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Expressed his love for Joseph and the religion he taught, and always remembered his associations with the Prophet with exceeding joy.

Brother Henry Eyring felt a diffidence in speaking on such an occasion as he would prefer hearing from those who were personally acquainted with this good man whose birthday is being celebrated; bore an earnest testimony to the truth of so-called "Mormonism."

Brother Barney, an old veteran in the Church related many incidents of personal history more or less connected with the history of the Prophet.

A song followed, by Bro. S. L. Adams, who has a clear, pleasing voice. Another "old-timer," Bro. Burgess, then spoke. He also, like Bro. Barney, was associated at times with Joseph, and drew from his memory pictures in which Joseph was portrayed. A poem, beautiful in expression, and full of divine inspiration, written by Sister Eliza R. Snow Smith, was read by Susa Young Gates. No doubt it will soon be published so that all Israel can read and be glad that the wife of our beloved Prophet is still with us to sing his praise on earth.

Elder Milo Andrus then followed in a powerful address, following in line of the former speakers. He, too, drew upon his memory for pictures, and pointed them with exhortations to daily efforts in the great cause of truth.

The choir sang a hymn, after which Sister Eliza R. Snow Smith addressed the people. She was filled with a powerful spirit of testimony. Her words were full of comfort. Her early life was spent under pleasant circumstances. Her first associations with this Church were those which brought her in constant communication with God's prophet; and the more she knew him, the more she became acquainted with his character, the more she loved him, the more she respected him. She had guided her life by the words of Joseph during his life, and afterwards the word of Brigham Young was the word of God to her; and now President Taylor was the man to whom she looked for the divine word. She felt rejoiced that she had the privilege of bearing her testimony on this occasion in St. George. She felt honored to stand here and bear testimony of that noble man, that man of God—that man that stood between God and the whole human family—and sometimes alone but for his God, and as God and one honest man is a big majority he was not quite alone, I say I feel honored to speak these few words and bear my testimony to that man of God—my husband.

Bro. Nobles followed, with some reminiscences of the life of Joseph, whom he had loved exceedingly. Told of the cholera scourge sent to the people, and his own miraculous escape therefrom. Also of the rescue of Joseph from jail, and other interesting facts that are now part of our church history.

Sister Zina D. Young told of Bro. Joseph's remark in relation to the revelation on celestial marriage. How an angel came to him with a drawn sword, and said if he did not obey this law he would lose his priesthood; and in the keeping of it he, Joseph, did not know but it would cost him his life. Bore a faithful testimony to the great nobility of Joseph Smith and the greatness of the work he commenced in this dispensation.

Bro. McAllister referred to the extreme youth of Joseph when first called of God. Spoke of his happy, joyous disposition. Told of a dream or vision in which he saw Joseph