

DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER WILFORD WOODRUFF,

In the 15th Ward Meeting House
on Sunday evening, June
13th, 1880.

REPORTED BY GEO. F. GIBBS.

I HAVE spent but very little time in Salt Lake City on the Sabbath day since my return from the south; Saturdays and Sundays I have generally spent the time attending our Quarterly Conferences abroad. I have felt as though I would like to visit the people in a ward capacity as far as I have opportunity, and I thought I would call down and visit our friends of the 15th Ward this evening.

I have been very much edified in listening to Bro. Morgan, and I consider he has a correct idea of the state of our country, and also with regard to the events that await us, as a people, and also this generation. Part of Bro. Morgan's remarks remind me of my first mission, especially that part describing the manner in which the missionaries in the Southern States travel. The ground that Bro. Morgan has been traveling over, I traversed through the winter of 1834-5 and the year following; and I could not help contrasting, in my own mind, while listening to him, the manner in which he and his brethren travel, with the manner in which I and others traveled in the early days. You who have read the Doctrine and Covenants understand that some of the revelations therein contained were given unto us at that time. The first missionary labor I performed in this Church was done by commandment, without purse or scrip. My first mission after I went up to Zion's Camp was through the Southern States. I called upon Bishop Partridge, who was our first Bishop, who was then in Missouri, Clay County. He said he wished some of the elders to go into the Southern country. I asked him a few questions, some of which were these: "Where do you want me to go?" He said, "I would like you to go through Missouri into Arkansas." Said I, "Jackson County lies directly in our road, is it your advice that we go through Jackson County?" He replied that he had not faith enough himself to travel through Jackson County; but that if we had we might do so. You, perhaps, will remember that we had just been driven out from there, and it was as much as a Mormon's life was worth to be seen in Jackson County. I said to him: "Bishop Partridge, shall we go without purse or scrip?" He said, "I have not got faith enough to do it myself, if you have you can try it." I was a boy, and I must say—not that I have any fault to find with Bishop Partridge, for he was a good man—that he did not encourage us much. We had the commandment of God on this point, to go without purse or scrip, on the one side, and the Bishop's advice on the other. I said I would not take purse or scrip, because the law of God forbid it. I and my companion started out. In going through Jackson County we dared not call upon anybody, and being hungry, we went into a corn-field and took the ears of corn and ate the corn like horses, without grinding, though some of it we pounded. We continued our way South, and having no money, after leaving Jackson County we begged our bread from door to door; and when we asked for something we always received it, and we were never turned out of doors. I refer to these things because they come to my mind, and cannot help contrasting in my own mind how different things were forty five years ago from what they are to-day. Brother Morgan has been telling us how they travel in the South, and I can bear testimony to what he has said, that when a man goes forth trusting in God he gets along fully as well, feels better, and generally has as good success as the man who goes into the missionary field with his pockets full of money.

I traveled through Arkansas, and had quite an experience. I had visions and dreams to warn me of danger and to encourage me in my labors. In one instance, a man came towards me, intending to kill me; the circumstance was shown me in a vision the night before. A mob of thirty men was raised, and they swore they would ride us on a rail, and tar and feather us, and then hang us. My companion was in favor of leaving the country; but

I told him I was going to stay there at the risk of my life. When the mob approached us, the leader came forward with the intention of killing me; the consequence was precisely as had been shown me in my vision—when he got to where I was he fell dead at my feet; and it was not more than ten days when twenty of this mob took sick and died—all done by the same power and by the destroying angel who is both powerful to save or destroy. We remained there until we saw the literal fulfillment of what had been shown me in the night vision. I held the office of a priest, while my companion was an elder, and you know how a person would feel in those days if he rebelled against a man over him in the priesthood. I did so, and it was the only time in my life that I ever attempted to do such a thing. When my partner told me he was going to leave, I told him that he should not do so, neither would I; and I persisted in holding him there for two weeks. During this time we witnessed the hand of the Lord in preserving our lives and in slaying our enemies, and now was the time for us to go to work, but which we did not do; in that we did wrong, for after remaining there two weeks, my companion said he would not stop any longer, and I dared not stay there alone, and therefore we left. If we had remained, after the door had been thus opened, I have not a doubt but what we would have raised up quite a large branch of the Church. But my companion did not wish to stop longer, the only ordinance he administered during this mission was to baptize a man and woman who received us, Father and Mother Hibber, who believed in the divinity of the Book of Mormon. The man who was struck dead at my feet was Mr. Akeman, who lived in Jackson County, Mo., during the persecutions, and buried his wife there. He had several sons six feet high. The old gentleman passed through much, and then apostatized and went to Arkansas and settled there. It would have been better for him to have kept the faith, for he did not live long after he got there, and I do not think he got much glory either. After our two weeks' experience in this place the whole neighborhood seemed ready to receive the gospel, and if I had stopped there, I am satisfied that I could have built up quite a church. It is true, being a priest, I could not have confirmed believers after baptizing them for the remission of their sins, but I could have baptized them and administered the sacrament.

Leaving this place, and having no money to travel, we went to Arkansas River, and there dug out a canoe from the trunk of a cottonwood tree, and paddled ourselves a distance of one hundred and twenty-five miles down the river. The first day we made about forty miles, and stopped over night with a poor woman who lived in a log cabin without a floor. She gave us supper and breakfast, and also a piece of Johnny-cake and pork, which we took along. That day we went down to the Dardanelles, and stopped over night in a big tavern, which was unoccupied. There was not a man within twenty miles, and when we inquired what was the matter, we were told the place was haunted. We tied up our canoe, took our lunch, asked a blessing on it and ate it. After dark we went to bed, and I slept soundly, on one of the best of feather beds, (in a dream,) at my father's house, and it is hardly necessary for me to say, nobody haunted us or disturbed our slumber in the least.

After a good night's rest we went on to Little Rock and tied up our canoe. After visiting here, we went on to where a man named Jones lived, where we left our canoe, and preached the next day. We then walked back to Little Rock, and taking the old military road, started to cross the Mississippi swamp, which was, the most part of it, covered with water from the place we started to Memphis, Tennessee—a distance of about one hundred and eighty miles. We had to wade through mud and water sometimes knee deep, which had the effect of giving me an attack of rheumatism, which crippled me. My companion was in good health and wanted to hurry on, so we parted; he left me resting on a log. I was now alone, lame and without food, in a swamp, some thirty-five miles from the nearest house. In considering the situation, and being all covered with mud, I could not help laughing at my condition—my companion leaving me sitting on a log in a swamp, thirty-five miles from any house, without food. I did not see my companion again for two years. But, withal,

I knew I needed assistance, so when my companion had gone out of sight I knelt down in the water and prayed fervently to the Lord to heal me, so that I could continue my journey. I felt the operation of the Holy Spirit upon me; I arose from my knees, the pain having left me. I then went on, bearing testimony to a family here and there wherever opportunity presented itself. When I came to Memphis I was there without any money. I went to the best tavern in the city, which was kept by a Mr. Jackson. I told him of my financial condition, and asked him if he would keep me over night. Said he, scanning me from head to foot, "What is your calling?" I said, "I am a preacher of the gospel." He looked at me again and burst out laughing, and then said: "You look like one." [Laughter.] I could not take any exceptions, because the ministers of the various denominations, in traveling over the country, were furnished with a good saddle horse, they always had money and wore good clothes. And the idea of a man who had waded through mud and water, and partly crippled through rheumatism, claiming to be a preacher, I could not blame him for laughing at me; in fact, I could not help laughing myself. Mr. Jackson rather suspected me; I believe he thought I was one of Murvill's Clan—a set of men who were stealing negroes and killing men. He asked me then: "How shall I know that you are a preacher?" I put my hand into my pocket, took out a paper and presented it to him, telling him at the same time that that was my license. After reading it over, and still keeping up his laughing spell, he said: "But how shall I know that this is a genuine certificate? Will you preach?" "For mercy's sake," said I, "don't set me a preaching." And it had the effect of making him feel quite curious to hear me. He took my valise out of my hand, saying that I must preach. I was invited into the house, and while I was resting and waiting for supper, Mr. Jackson sent all over town and invited the "upper ten" to come and hear a "Mormon" preach; and while I was eating supper they came, dressed in silks and satins and broadcloth, and before I got through the house was full of people, who sat looking at me, no doubt expecting to be highly entertained. Supper over, the landlord intimated to me that they were ready to hear the preaching. I told him I was ready to preach to them. He then set me in a corner, where I was guarded by about a dozen men, who would have prevented me from jumping out of the window, in case I had made the attempt to do so. I had a Bible and a hymn book. On opening the book, I asked if some one would kindly lead in singing, that I did not possess the gift of singing. At this my congregation burst out laughing. When this subsided, I knelt down and offered prayer, and then preached to them for one hour and a quarter; I had the best attention, the Spirit of the Lord rested mightily upon me, and I have always thought that I preached that evening one of the best sermons I ever preached in my life. The people seemed to partake of the spirit that rested on me, and I think I revealed to them their private life as clear as it was ever shown to them; and I knew this, because I could read them as they sat before me. When I got through I was left standing alone; and in a short time the house was cleared, and the landlady came and showed me to bed. Where I slept was an upper room next to a wholesale store; and in the next room was a company of men discussing the merits of the sermon, and the partition being of board, I could hear all that was said. Among other things, I heard one man saying: "Jim, how in hell did that stranger know what you were about?" After talking considerably they began to dispute among themselves, when one of them said, "Let us have the preacher up to decide it." "No," said the landlord, "we have had enough of him for one night." I went on to Middle Tennessee and labored there one year, and preached and baptized a great many people before I was ordained an elder. I afterwards was ordained an elder by Warren Parrish, and a seventy by D. W. Patten. I ordained Brother Smoot and Benjamin Clapp elders. All my traveling was done without purse or scrip; and God was with me, although a young man, and revealed unto me his mind and will.

And here let me say to our young deacons, teachers and priests, I had as much of the power of God with me, and was blessed with as much of his spirit, while I held the Aaronic

priesthood as when an apostle. I had as much of his power to help me to preach and to deliver me from the grasp of my enemies as I ever had since. I say this for the encouragement of our young men and our boys who are called to the priesthood; and I would say to them, fill your position, magnify your calling in humility before God, and seek after him in your youth, and also seek to prepare yourselves for future usefulness in the great work which lies before you, and the Lord will work through you, making you honored instruments in helping to bring to pass his great and eternal purposes with regard to the salvation of mankind and the overthrow of wickedness in the earth.

While it occurs to me I will relate one little circumstance which took place after I had been out two years. Elders David W. Patten and Warren Parrish had been laboring together in Tennessee. Elder Patten had returned to Kirtland, leaving Brother Parrish in charge of the branches of the Church throughout the Southern country. And while laboring under Brother Parrish, and still holding the Aaronic priesthood, I received a letter from Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, informing me that they wished Brother Parrish to come home, and me to remain in charge in his stead; and among other things, Brother Joseph said to me, "I will promise you, in the name of the Lord, that by so doing you shall lose no blessing that would otherwise be conferred upon you." Just before Bro. Parrish left he ordained me an elder, and during that year after Bro. Parrish left I baptized some thirty persons. When I received the letter referred to from the Prophet Joseph, I was in Brother Smoot's house; he was there and had read my letter. I remember how well I felt at the promises that had been made to me; and when bedtime came I retired to the small room which I occupied, shut the door, and soon received a heavenly vision. Here let me say with regard to seeing visions; when Joseph Smith received the visitation of Moroni, Peter, James and John and others, they came and talked with him as one man talks with another, face to face. In other cases men have been wrapt in vision, as, for instance, Paul, when describing his state, said that he did not know whether he was in the body or out of the body, but he saw and heard things not to be uttered. And it was so with me; I could not tell whether I was in the body or out of the body; but one thing I do know, I was not asleep. I saw a great many things in that vision which were truly wonderful. I saw the resurrection of the dead; I saw the sun turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, and the stars from heaven fall. I saw seven golden lions sit in the heavens as burning brass, and the angel told me that they were representatives of the different dispensations. These are things I hardly ever talk about, and I only do so now because it is in the line of my remarks, and because they come to my mind. If I had been a painter, the next morning when I awoke, or even to this day—as the scene has a lasting remembrance on my mind—I could have sat down and portrayed these glorious things; they made a much stronger impression on my mind than if I had learned them from books. I name this to show you, my young brethren, that it makes no difference what office a man holds, or what his condition in life may be, as long as he trusts in the Lord and he magnifies the office he holds, no matter what may be that calling. This was the manner in which we traveled in early days, and we had joy in our labor, the Lord blessing us with souls for our hire. I traveled all over the country, comprising a circuit of some three hundred or four hundred miles, and labored there two years. I built up a number of branches of the Church, and among others I baptized a Campbellite preacher and a good many of his flock. When I returned to Kirtland I took Brother Smoot with me; I was there when the endowments were given in the winter of 1836-7, and received many blessings at the hands of the Lord. In this respect I certainly realized the fulfillment of the promises made me by the Prophet Joseph when I was requested to remain in the Southern country to take charge of the branches of the Church in that land.

I was in Kirtland at the time of the great apostasy, which some of you have read of in the history. Men have asked me why men who have borne the apostleship have apostatized. I would ask, why do

men apostatize to-day? Because they set their hearts upon the things of this world, which in time alienate them from God and from the duties of the holy priesthood; and this was the case with them. The key to this matter may be had by reading the letter written by the Prophet Joseph when confined in Liberty Jail; it plainly states why men apostatize. Many are called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen? Because they set their hearts too much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men. That was the case with some of the first quorum of the Twelve. I hold in my hand a copy of the Book of Mormon, the truthfulness and divinity of which is attested to by the signatures of eleven men, and yet there was not one of these witnesses, excepting the three Smiths and Hiram Page, but what turned against Joseph. They did not deny their testimony to the truth of the Book of Mormon; on the contrary, they maintained their position in that respect to the last moment of their life; but they rebelled against and opposed the Prophet Joseph, and consequently they fell, and will be found under condemnation. When men undertake to use their priesthood aside from its legitimate purposes—the building up of the kingdom of God—the Spirit of God is grieved, and the heavens withdraw themselves, and then "amen" to the priesthood and authority of such men. It matters not who the man may be, or how great his influence in the community, he must sooner or later fall a prey to the devourer of souls. And on the other hand, when men holding this holy priesthood magnify it, it becomes a power and a key to them, and they have power before God and the heavens.

I was in Kirtland during that dark hour through which the Church passed. Brother Joseph hardly knew who his friends were when he met them, whether they were members of the quorum of the Twelve, high priests, seventies, the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, or any one else. It was the darkest day this Church has ever known, as far as the power of apostasy is concerned; and I hope and trust it will never again be repeated to the same extent, although men may continue to apostatize, when they forsake God and his cause. And while things were in this state, the Spirit of God said to me, leave this place, go to the islands of the sea and preach the everlasting gospel, and let the scenes in Kirtland take care of themselves. I had not taken counsel with anybody, but I went to Brigham Young and Brother Kimball and stated to them my feelings. Brothers Rigdon and Kimball said go. And afterwards Brother Kimball desired me to remain with him, and help him turn his house around. I stayed with him two days, and then started off on my mission, the results of which I have very briefly alluded to.

I also traveled through Canada in company with John Allen Hale and Milton Holmes, whom I chose as my associates. Bro. Hale was not what was called a great preacher, but was a good man, who could bear testimony to the divinity of the gospel we preach. I preached and baptized some in Canada. Bro. John E. Page was there at the time; he was afterwards chosen a member of the quorum of the Twelve, but was among those who afterwards apostatized. Traveling through Canada, I went through Oswego, took the canal and went to Connecticut to my father's house. I had not seen my parents from the time I embraced the gospel, a period of some five years. Before starting out on my mission, however, I went to see Father Smith, the patriarch, who blessed me and he gave me the promise that I should be successful in bringing my father's house into the church. When I called upon him I preached to him and baptized him and my stepmother and my uncle, Ozam Woodruff and wife and son and my step-sister, together with others who lived in my father's house.

I then went to Fox Island, where I organized a branch of the church. When we landed there at midnight we were entire strangers without a single penny. The first house we approached we found vacant; we went on to the next, where we were accommodated with a bed. The next morning I said to the lady, "Will you tell me if there is any religion on this island, and if so, what?" She answered, "the Baptist religion." "Have you a church?" "Yes, a Baptist church." "Have you a minister?" "Yes, a Baptist