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## HISTORY OF JOSEPH SMITH.

APRIL, 1844.

Saturday, 6.—Conference met pursuant to adjournment. Present: Prest. JOSEPH SMITH, HYRUM SMITH, SIDNEY RIGDON and WM. MARKS. Of the Twelve: BRIGHAM YOUNG, HEBER C. KIMBALL, WILLARD RICHARDS, WILFORD WOODRUFF, JOHN TAYLOR and GEORGE A. SMITH.

The Members of the High Council, an immense number of Elders, and a very large concourse of people.

Presidents Joseph and Hyrum Smith came to the stand at a quarter past 10 o'clock, when the meeting was called to order by Elder Brigham Young. The choir sang a hymn, after which

President Joseph Smith rose to state to the congregation the nature of the business which would have to come before them. He stated that it had been expected by some that the little petty difficulties which have existed would be brought up and investigated before this conference, but it will not be the case; these things are of too trivial a nature to occupy the attention of so large a body. I intend to give you some instruction on the principles of eternal truth, but will defer it until others have spoken, in consequence of the weakness of my lungs. The Elders will give you instruction, and then, if necessary, I will offer such corrections as may be proper to fill up the interstices. Those who feel desirous of sowing the seeds of discord will be disappointed on this occasion. It is our purpose to build up and establish the principles of righteousness, and not to break down and destroy. The Great Jehovah has ever been with me, and the wisdom of God will direct me in the seventh hour. I feel in closer communion and better standing with God than ever I felt before in my life, and I am glad of this opportunity to appear in your midst. I thank God for the glorious day that he has given us. In as large a congregation it is necessary that the greatest order and decorum be observed; I request this at your hands and believe that you will all keep good order.

Prayer was offered by W. W. Phelps, after which the choir sang a hymn. Elder Sidney Rigdon then rose and said: "It is with no ordinary degree of satisfaction I enjoy this privilege this morning; want of health and other circumstances have kept me in silence for nearly the last five years. It can hardly be expected that when the violence of sickness has used its influence, and the seeds of disease have so long preyed upon me, that I can rise before this congregation only in weakness. I am now come forth from a bed of sickness, and have enough of strength left to appear here for the first time in my true character. I have not come before a conference for the last five years in my true character. I shall consider this important privilege sacred in my family history during life. I hardly promise myself lungs to make this congregation hear me; I shall do the best I can, and the greatest can do no more.

The circumstances by which we are now surrounded points out the principles of my discourse—the history of this church which I have known from its infancy: my text is, 'Behold the church of God of the last days.' I do not know that I can find it in the Bible; I do not think it necessary to have Paul to make a text for me; I can make a text for myself. I recollect in the year 1830 I met the whole church of Christ in a little old log house about 20 feet square, near Waterloo, N. Y., and we began to talk about the kingdom of God as if we had the world at our command; we talked with great confidence and talked big things; although we were not many people we had big feelings.

We knew 14 years ago that the church would become as large as it is to-day: we were as big then as we shall ever be; we began to talk like men in authority and power, we looked upon the men of the earth as grasshoppers. If we did not see this people, we saw by vision the church of God, a thousand times larger; and when men would come in they would say we wanted to upset the government, although we were not enough to well man a farm, or meet a woman with a milk pail: all the Elders, all the members met in conference in a room 20 feet square.

I recollect Elder Phelps being put in jail for reading the Book of Mormon. He came to see us, and expressed great astonishment, and left us apparently pondering in his heart; he afterwards came to Kirtland, Ohio, and said he was a convert. Many things were taught, believed, and preached then which have since come to pass; we knew the whole world would laugh at us, so we concealed ourselves, and there was much excitement about our secret meetings, charging us with designs against the government, and with laying plans to get money, &c., which never existed in the heads of anyone else, and if we had talked in public we should have been ridiculed more than we were, the world being entirely ignorant of the testimony of the Prophets and without knowledge of what God was about to do, treated all we said with pretended contempt and much ridicule; and had they have heard all we said, it would have made it worse for us.

We talked about the people coming as doves to the windows, that all nations should flock unto it; that they should come bending to the standard of Jesus, saying, 'our fathers have taught falsehood and things in which there is

no profit,' and of whole nations being born in one day. We talked such big things that men could not bear them, and they not only ridiculed us for what we did say in public, but threatened and inflicted much personal abuse, and had they heard all we said their violence would have been insupportable. God had great things to say for the salvation of the world, which, if they had been told to the public, would have brought persecution upon us unto death; so we were obliged to retire to our secret chambers and commune ourselves with God. If we had told the people what our eyes beheld this day, we should not have been believed, but the rascals would have shed our blood, if we had only told them what we believed. There we sat in secret and beheld the glorious visions and powers of the kingdom of heaven, pass and repass; we had not a mighty congregation to shelter us; if a mob came upon us we had to run and hide ourselves to save our lives.

The time has now come to tell why we held secret meetings. We were maturing plans fourteen years ago which we can now tell; were we maturing plans to corrupt the world, to destroy the peace of society? No! Let fourteen years experience of the church tell the story. The church never would have been here if we had not done as we did in secret. The cry of false prophet and impostor rolled upon us. I do not know that anything has taken place in the history of this church which we did not then believe; it was written upon our hearts and never could be taken away; it was indelibly engraved, no power beneath yonder heavens could obliterate it. This was the period when God laid the foundation of the church, and he laid it firmly, truly, and upon eternal truth.

If any man says it is not the work of God, I know they lie. Some of you who know you have a house, how long would it take to make you reason yourself into a belief that you have no house where you now reside with your family? Neither have we any power whereby we can ever persuade ourselves that this is not the church of God. We do not care who sinks or swims, or opposes, but we know here is the church of God, and I have authority before God for saying so. I have the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy; I have slept with it, I have walked with it; the idea has never been out of my heart for a moment, and I will reap the glory of it when I leave this world. I defy men, and hell, and devils to put it out of my heart; I defy all, and will triumph in spite of them.

I know God; I have gazed upon the glory of God, the throne, visions and glories of God, and the visions of eternity in days gone by. What is a man of God to do when he sees all the madness, wrath and follies of our persecutors? He will do as God does; he will sit and laugh; one breath from the nostrils of God would blow them out of existence to hell. These were the beginning of good days; shut up in a room, eating nothing but dry Johnny cake and buttermilk. Every man who had a little farm, or clothes, sold them and distributed what he had among the rest, and did the best they could. I had little to eat, little to wear, and yet it was the beginning of good days.

Some say I want plenty to eat, plenty to drink, plenty to wear, and a good house to live in; and say they, then I will believe; but God will not give it, until you have proved yourselves to him.

No wonder, then, that we should be joyful to-day. If the people will do as they are told, I will tell you what to do. Get the visions of heaven, and seek not what you shall eat or what you shall drink, but seek the will of God; get into the presence of God and then you will have Johnny cake and milk and water no more. Would you not be astonished if even now we should tell the glories and the privileges of the Saints of God to you and to the world? We should be ridiculed; and no wonder we shut it up in secret. If we were to tell you when Jehovah looked on, lo it is beauty, it is heaven, it is felicity to look on; I should marvel if it were otherwise; if a man tells you one glory or one message, he is learning another at the same time. Do not be astonished, then, if we even yet have secret meetings, asking God for things for your benefit.

Do not be afraid, go back to the commencement of this church and see what was concocted then. There was no evil concocted when we first held secret meetings, and it is the same now; has God forgotten to be gracious?—to be merciful to mankind? Did he ever concoct anything that was devilish for mankind? He could not do it; I never am afraid of God or man concocting anything to hurt me, I have faith to detect man even if he did; I would ask God to detect them, and would hold them fast before he should do it. I am not afraid of men or devils. I have none of those fears, jealousies, dreads, forebodings, surmises, &c.: I put my trust in God, and whatever God does for me, is only for my salvation.

A man is a bad teamster who runs his team in the worst road. [And showed how much like the gospel.] What I have already said, is only to prepare the way. [Here five of the Pottowattomie tribe appeared with their interpreter, and were assisted to the stand by the president.] I am going to tell of something that surprised me at the beginning of the church; I have handled, heard, seen and known things which I have not yet told.

After the church began to grow, it was favored with monstrous wise men; they had so much wisdom that they could dispute what God said, and what his servant said. They were opposed to virtue; they would say they had revelations and visions, and were as certain that God had given it, as I was that the devil had.

He referred to the children of Israel who were snivelling and murmuring about their leeks and onions, &c., &c., and so it is in these last days, some men are always yelling about what the church believes, and opposing every good thing.

I want devils to gratify themselves; and if howling, yelling, yelping, will do you any good, do it till you are all damned. If calling us devils, &c., will do you any good, let us have the whole of it, and you can then go on your way to hell without a grunt.

We hear these things ever since the church existed, they have come up with us, they have had so much more wisdom, they knew all about the kingdom before God revealed it; and they know all things before they are heard; they understand more than God knows. We gather of all kinds; if we get all nations, we get all wisdom, all cunning, and everything else.

The sectarians cannot be as wise as we are, for they have only got the plans of man for salvation; but we have got man's plans, the devil's plans, and the best of all, we have God's plan.

I do not know whether there are any of these wise men here this morning; I have merely given this as a part of the history of this church. I am disposed to give some reasons why salvation only belongs to the kingdom of God, and to that alone.

I will endeavor to show why salvation belongs to us more peculiarly, in contradistinction to all other bodies; will this be clear enough?

I discover one thing, mankind have labored under one universal mistake about this, viz.: salvation was distinct from government, i.e., that I can build a church without government, and that thing have power to save me.

When God sets up a system of salvation, he sets up a system of government; when I speak of a government I mean what I say; I mean a government that shall rule over temporal and spiritual affairs.

Every man is a government of himself, and infringe upon no government. A man is not an honorable man if he is not above all law, and above government.

I see in our town we have need of government; some study law only for the purpose of seeing how many feuds, how many broils they can kick up, how much they can disturb the peace of the public, without breaking the law, and then say: 'I know my rights, and will have them.' I did not know it was the Marshal, or I would not have done it.

He is no gentleman; gentlemen would not insult a poor man in the street, but would bow to him, as much as those who appear more respectable. No marshal, or any one else, should pull me up; we ought to live a great way within the circle of the laws of the land, I would live far above all law.

The law of God is far more righteous than the laws of the land; the laws of God are far above the laws of the land. The kingdom of God does not interfere with the laws of the land, but keeps itself by its own laws." [Reported by Elder Thomas Bullock.]

[Elder Rigdon stopped to refresh himself.] The choir sang hymn 104.

Elder John Taylor being called upon to address the congregation, said,—It gives me pleasure to meet and associate with so large an assemblage of the Saints. I always feel at home among the brethren. I consider them the honorable of the earth, and if I can do anything to conduce to their happiness, or that will in any wise tend to their edification, I am satisfied.

I therefore address this congregation with cheerfulness and pleasure, and if by unfolding any of the principles of truth that I am in possession of, or laying before you anything pertaining to the kingdom; if my ideas will enlarge your minds, or produce beneficial results to any, I shall consider myself on this, as on all other occasions, amply repaid.

Many things have been spoken by Elder Rigdon concerning the early history of this church. There is no individual who has searched the oracles of eternal truth, but his mind will be touched with the remarks made by our venerable friend which unfold the dispensation of Jehovah, and have a tendency to produce the most thrilling feelings in the bosoms of many who are this day present, and to promote our general edification; he traces with pleasure on the historic page the rise of nations, kingdoms and empires. Historians dwell with great minuteness on the heroic deeds, the chivalrous acts, the dangers and deliverances, the tact, bravery and heroism of their chieftains, generals and governments.

We, as republicans, look back to the time when this nation was under the iron rule of Great Britain, and groaned under the power, tyranny and oppression of that powerful nation. We trace with delight the name of a Washington, a Jefferson, a La Fayette, and an Adams, in whose bosoms burnt the spark of liberty. These themes are dwelt upon with delight by our own legislators, our governors and presidents; they are subjects which fire our souls with patriotic ardor.

But if these things animate them so much, how much more great, noble, and exalted are the things laid before us. They were engaged in founding kingdoms and empires that were destined to dissolution and decay, and although many of them were great, formidable and powerful; they now exist only in name. Their 'cloud capped towers, their solemn temples, are dissolved,' and nothing now remains of their former magnificence or ancient grandeur, but a few dilapidated buildings and broken columns; a few shattered fragments remain to tell to this and to other generations, the perishable nature of earthly pomp and worldly glory.

They were engaged in founding empires and establishing kingdoms and powers that had in themselves the seeds of destruction, and were destined to decay. We are laying the foundation of a kingdom that shall last for ever—that shall bloom in time and blossom in eternity. We are engaged in a greater work than ever occupied the attention of mortals; we live in a day that prophets and kings desired to see, but died without the sight.

When we hear the history of the rise of this kingdom from one who has been with it from its infancy—from the lips of our venerable friend who has taken an active part in all the history of the church, can we be surprised if he should feel animated, and that his soul should burn with heavenly zeal? We see in him a man of God who can contemplate the glories of heaven—the visions of eternity, and who yet looks forward to the opening glories which the great Eloheim has manifested to him pertaining to righteousness and peace—a man who now beholds the things roll on which he has long since beheld in prophetic vision.

Most men have established themselves in authority by laying desolate other kingdoms and the destruction of other powers. Their kingdoms have been founded in blood, and supported by tyranny and oppression. The greatest chieftains of the earth have obtained their glory—if glory it can be called—by blood, carnage and ruin. One nation has been built up at the expense and ruin of another, and one man has been made at the expense of another, and yet these great men were called honorable for their inglorious deeds of rapine. They have slain their thousands, and caused the orphans to weep and the widows to mourn.

Men did these things because they could do it—because they had power to desolate nations and spread terror and desolation. They have made themselves immortal as great men. The patriots of this country had indeed a laudable object in view—a plausible excuse for the course they took. They stood up in defence of their rights, liberty and freedom; but where are now those principles of freedom? Where are the laws that protect all men in their religious opinions? Where the laws that say, 'a man shall worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience?' What say ye, ye Saints, ye who are exiles in the land of LIBERTY? How came you here? Can you in this land of equal rights return in safety to your possessions in Missouri? No! You are exiles from thence, and there is no power, no voice, no arm to redress your grievances. Is this the gracious boon for which your fathers fought, and struggled, and died? Shades of the venerable dead! could you but gaze upon this scene and witness tens of thousands of Americans in exile on Columbia's soil, if pity could touch your bosoms, how would you mourn for the oppressed?—if indignation, how would you curse the heartless wretches that have so desecrated and polluted the temple of liberty? 'How has the gold become dim, and the fine gold, how has it changed?' Let it not be told among the heathen monarchs of Europe, lest they laugh and say 'ha! ha! so would we have it.'

Ye Saints, never let it go abroad that ye are exiles in the land of liberty, lest ye disgrace your republic in the eyes of the nations of the earth; but tell it to those who robbed and plundered, and refused to give you your rights; tell your rulers that all their deeds of fame are tarnished, and their glory is departed.

Are we now indeed in a land of liberty—of freedom—of equal rights? Would to God I could answer yes, but no! no! I cannot. They have robbed us, we are stripped of our possessions, many of our friends are slain, and our government says, 'Your cause is just, but we can do nothing for you.'

Hear it, ye great men, we are here in exile! Here are thousands of men in bondage in a land of liberty—of freedom!! If ye have any patriotism left, shake off your fetters, and come and proclaim us free, and give us our rights. I speak of this government as being one of the best of governments, as one of the greatest and purest; and yet, what a melancholy picture.

O ye venerable fathers who fought for your liberty; blush for your children, and mourn, mourn over your country's shame. We are now talking about a government which seta herself up as a pattern for the nations of the earth, and yet, O what a picture. If this is the best, the most patriotic, the most free, what is the situation of the rest?

Here we speak with national pride of a Washington, a La Fayette, a Monroe, and a Jefferson, who fought for their liberties, and achieved one of the greatest victories ever won; and scarcely has one generation passed away before fifteen thousand citizens petition government for redress of their wrongs, and they turn a deaf ear to their cry.