PART 2

DESERET EVENING NEWS.

9 TO 12

TRUTH AND LIBERTY;

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1896. SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH.

Our Present Duties

Discourse Delivered at the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Sunday, February 2nd, 1896, by

ELDER ABRAHAM H. CANNON.

[REPORTED BY ARTHUR WINTER.]

I am gratified to see the goodly number of Latter-day Saints who are in attendance at this meeting, and I trust that the Lord will be pleased to give me a text which will strengthen our faith and help us in the great work which He has called us to perform.

I wonder if there is any member of the Church who realizes the great responsibility that rests upon us as a people. I think this very much indeed; and I am sure that many of us have but a slight comprehension of our duties and obligations; if we may judge from the conduct of those who profess to be Latter-day Saints. I have wondered if our condition would be in a condition to bring us to a realization of the importance of the principles which He has revealed, for you know that we are led again and again to become careless and stiffnecked, when something occurs which is acceptable to us and sometimes very trying to arouse our thoughts and to impress us with the importance of some forgotten or neglected duty. I am reminded of a story told by the Greek and Roman churches. It runs in this way: At the time the persecutions were raging so bitterly against the early Christians, some youths sought escape in a secret and lonely cave. After a time the Lord mercifully permitted them to fall asleep; and so deep and long was their slumber that they did not awaken till two hundred years had passed. When they were aroused from their sleep they went forth into the city of Ephesus, to which they belonged, and finally they began to inquire of the people if there were any Christians in the city. "Christians!" was the response, "why, we are all Christians," and the scholars of it they pointed out the spot where the worship of God was carried on. Some of these youths visited the place of hearing they found the principles of the Gospel there taught according to the written word. They said it was popular to be Christians, and so popular, as it was when they left themselves. Emperors with their wealth, professors with their learning, and the humble workmen, were followers of the cross and professed disciples of Jesus. For a time they greatly rejoiced in the changed conditions of things; but as they mingled among the people they found that while the professions were abundant, the Spirit of the Gospel was not with them, the signs and gifts of faith were not manifested among the people, and generally speaking, respect for God was not there, where their prayers moved them to take them unto Himself.

I do not know, because I have not sufficiently long to compare conditions with what they were, whether we are drifting away from the faith which characterized the people of God in early days; but I am led to believe, from what I read, and see, and hear, that in some respects we are going into the same condition that prevailed when the young men came forth from their cloister. I ask myself if there is among us that simple, undeviating, unquestioning faith which we hear was manifest in all the early rise of the Church. It was then considered an evidence of weakness in the faith for Latter-day Saints to depend other than upon God for the restoration of their sick unto health. I remember reading—and you doubtless have read also—that whenever the people were afflicted, the first thought of the relatives, and of themselves, if they were capable of thinking, was to seek the ministrations of the Elders of the Church, believing in the words of the ancient Apostle, that the prayer of faith shall save the sick. Now, however, I find many instances of persons among this people whose first thought is not for God and His power, but for the Elders of the Church, but for some skill and wisdom to relieve them from the pain and sickness with which they are afflicted. True, when human power fails and human agency has been put in its stead, then the people go and look for the Elders as a last resort, instead of as a first resort; and if their faith is under such circumstances, then they complain at the lack of faith among the people and the loss of power by the Elders, and the decrease of the gifts of the Gospel in the Church, and if they would seek the cause of this affliction which came upon them they would find it in their own weakness and neglect of duty.

We are much in the condition of the two brothers of whom the story is told that they lived somewhere one day, in the time was coming, surrounded by very high stone rocks that fell from the top down, and as the stones came down they began to think of prayer. One asked the other to pray for the relief, saying he did not know how. His companion finally decided to offer a prayer, and he began to talk with the Lord for deliverance, by promising to devote his life to His service, to present Him all his sheep and his cattle, at which the companion concluded to time that he did not own any sheep or cattle. "Why," said the first, "you are stealing from the Lord!" "Why, I was trying to deceive the Lord because he was in danger," he was trying to deceive the Lord with an outward show of humility and humility, it seems to me, is sometimes as in Latter-day Saints in a low state condition, that when we are in some condition, that when we are in some Gospel covenants and obligations we are Latter-day Saints and yet we are not living up to the covenants we have made with the Lord. His commandments and he do not dwell in our hearts there is no disposition of doing as we promise.

I have said that the faith which belongs to this Gospel the sick can be healed today. I know that when human skill is powerless, is unsuccessful, God is near to hear and answer the petitions of His children. I know that the gift of healing is within the souls of men and women here in the flesh, and they could exercise it if the people who appeal for their help and ministration as servants and handmaidens of God were only in a condition to receive these blessings.

Yet I would not say a word against the use of the wisdom which God gives to us. I delight in seeing men study the human organism, to learn its functions, to be capable of relieving pain, to assist suffering humanity in their distresses; but I feel that our Elders who study medicine and who desire to acquire skill in surgery should be men of faith in God, dependent above everything else upon the assistance which the Lord is willing to give to the learned and the skillful as well as to the unlearned and awkward. Yet with all our learning as physicians and as surgeons, we have only crossed the threshold of the science of medicine. New theories are coming into acceptance in the medical world; new discoveries are being made, that put to shame the present and the past learning of physicians. You who have followed this profession know the changes that have occurred; you know that new discoveries are occurring almost daily to relieve suffering humanity. Why, there is a large body of people in this country today who do not believe in the use of medicine at all in relieving sickness and pain. The man who instituted the system of osteopathy, as it is called, was ridiculed when he first announced his belief that by manipulation disease could be cured, pain could be relieved, and health and strength be instituted; but now he has a large following. You know of the discoveries that Pasteur and Edison and others have made; and now comes a new revelation to scientists and the medical fraternity—the discovery whereby a human skeleton, covered as it is with flesh, can be photographed, and surgeons will be able to examine diseases, bones or other parts of the system without using the knife until it is known to be absolutely necessary.

These things prompt me to remark that physicians and surgeons are only upon the threshold of this great science of life; and the brethren who undertake this study and who will allow their studies to be governed by the Spirit of God, will become the discoverers of great truths yet unknown to men of science; for the Spirit of God, that passeth all human understanding, can reveal to you, my brethren, to you, my sisters, things that are hidden from the knowledge of man, notwithstanding their years of study, of experiment and of investigation. And while we use skill, and while we attempt to acquire skill and knowledge, it should at all times be controlled and governed by the influence of the Spirit of God. If physicians come into my home, I want to see more of faith, men who believe in God and in His power, men who can pray to Him, or women who can pray to Him, with the assurance that their prayers will be heard and answered, men and women of humility and of meekness, with a knowledge that every gift they possess is from God, and that they are responsible to Him for its proper use.

Skill coupled with faith will prolong life. I believe that with the exercise of faith and the wisdom that God has given us we will be able to establish a condition of things among this people that is not found in the world. There will be less death. People will live to the age of a tree, and will pass away peacefully and without pain. The average life of man will be prolonged far beyond its present limit, and there will be a long-lived race. A race of people will be established in these mountains whose physical and intellectual strength will be the admiration of the world.

I see, too, in the lack of love among the people a departure from the early principle which governed the Latter-day Saints. Quarrelings among the Saints! Strife and contentions in almost every ward, and certainly in every stake of Zion. Quarrels, too, which the arbitration of men of God will not overcome. Quarrels between men bearing the high Priesthood—men who are kindred to each other as well as those who are only kindred in the Church. Quarrels between families, that cannot be corrected; if they are apparently overcome, it is only the covering up of the fires that burn in the soul, corrupting and devastating those who entertain the spirit which results from this discord and strife. Do you think such people can be true Latter-day Saints who with an outward show of forgiveness and of reconciliation will harbor in their souls the hatreds and the animosities which these quarrels have created? They cannot enjoy the Spirit of God so long as this condition of affairs continues. The advice that is given to us in the Doctrine and Covenants is so plain that none should fail to understand it, how our differences are to be settled, how our quarrels are to be overcome. "If thy brother or sister offend thee, thou shalt take him or her between him or her and thee alone; and if he or she confess, thou shalt be reconciled." Such a settlement Latter-day Saints should seek to gain when any trouble comes between them and their fellow-men; and when troubles are settled in this way they are generally thoroughly completely and eternally settled. Where it is necessary to bring in the services of a teacher or teachers, or the judgment of a bishop's court or a high council, it is seldom—indeed I do not know of a single instance where there has been such a harmony and good feeling re-established between the quarreling parties.

We all as people upon the face of the earth should be filled with that love of God which cannot be overcome by the acts of men, even though these acts are injurious to us. We should be able to say when wrong is done us, "The Lord judge between me and thee;" and from our hearts there should be crushed out every feeling of bitterness and hatred; for if we allow a spark thereof to remain, it will rankle and it will grow as the weed, choking out the good seed and preventing the development of the power of the Spirit of God within us. I say there is love—the love of the Gospel—lacking among this people. I wonder how many of us would today do as the early Saints did when they were driven from Nauvoo and only a few people were possessed of the means to transport themselves to a place of safety. Every man covenanted before God that he would not rest nor would he withhold his means until every soul had been gathered from out that city, which had been attacked by the mob; and in marching across these weary plains there was no thought on the part of the people to neglect their poor brethren and sisters who were left behind waiting the time of deliverance. How many of us would do this today if we were driven hence, or if the occasion arose for the sacrifice of time and comfort and property for the good of our fellow-men? I fear the trial would be greater than any we have yet encountered in this Church, because of the increase of wealth among us and its—I was going to say its unjust division; I will not say that, but its unequal division among the Latter-day Saints—a condition which will not be pleasing to God when His work is established in its power and in its glory in the latter days; for He has spoken of this in the revelations which He has given to us, that there must come a time when this inequality, these hills and hollows among the people cease of wealth, cease exist; they must be equal in all things, whether they be temporal or spiritual. It is then I look for one of the greatest trials the people have ever met. And do you think it will come about from our own inclinations, regardless of the manifestations of God concerning the law? I do not expect it, because we have made the effort to establish the principle of equality among us and have been unsuccessful in it, and we rest under the condemnation to some extent, of disobedience; but it will come, I am sure of it, to such a way that we will be glad to see the law established, and the people of the nation and the earth, seeing its perfect workings, will rejoice that there will be a place upon the earth where the conditions exist the rich and the poor do not exist, and where there will be no idleness nor paupers; where peace will reign, even the peace of heaven, when the whole world otherwise will be in confusion, discord and strife, and many hearts will fail them for fear, and their eyes will cast about to find a place of refuge and of safety from the troubles that afflict the human family. That day is coming, and it is nearer than the Latter-day Saints estimate. Those who have the love of the Gospel in their souls will find no trial in this new condition of things. Those who observe the greatest and the second greatest commandments as enunciated by the Savior will find no difficulty in meeting these requirements—they will love God with all their hearts and their neighbors as themselves. Do you think it would be any trial for me to give my brother a half or the whole of my property, if I loved him as myself? There would be no trial whatever in it. But the selfishness of mortality, the covetousness of this fallen estate, clings to me and clings to each one of us, and chokes out the pure love of God—that love which was exemplified in the life of the Savior. In this respect we have departed from the original feelings which inspired Latter-day Saints in the early rise of the Church.

We are lacking in another thing—in the seeking of counsel from those who preside over us. What! make slaves of the people? Ask them to seek counsel of those bishops, these men who work side by side with them? That was the way they did in Nauvoo, in Kirtland, and in other places; they sought the counsel of the brethren and sought it with a view to following it, not to ridicule it or to neglect it. Will some argue then that it was obedience to counsel that caused the people to be driven and to suffer as they did in those days? The argument is without foundation. They found success and blessing in following counsel, and it was disobedience to counsel that caused their driving out. If you will read the revelations of God as contained in the Doctrine and Covenants, you will find that He explicitly states this. I want counsel of my brethren—of my bishop, of those who preside over me in the ward and stake and in the church; I want their counsel because in their counsel there is safety. Do I show weakness or cowardice in thus advising with my presiding authorities? No; I feel that in doing so I show, not only my humility, but my good common sense. In the world those who are the most successful, who are the best educated, who are the most renowned, are the men who seek counsel; who mingle with their fellows and draw from each soul with whom they come in contact some item of truth to add to their store of knowledge. Today you find that people generally seek counsel to get out of difficulty, after they have plunged themselves into it. For a time I kept a record of people who sought counsel of the presiding authorities of the Church, as I heard of these cases and there was not one in twenty-five who sought counsel before performing the labor he had in mind. Twenty-four wanted counsel after they were in difficulty. That is the way you generally find it. I will warrant the bishops have ten times more trouble with those who fail to seek counsel until after injury has come than with those who seek counsel with the idea of following it before they engage in enterprises of various kinds. Why, the greatest men who ever lived sought counsel. Washington, with all his genius as a military commander, counseled with his generals, and above all he sought the advice and guidance of God the Eternal Father.

I do advise every Latter-day Saint to seek counsel. I say it is a duty that rests upon you to seek counsel of your brethren and your sisters. What would you think of a savage, who had never lived in a house, coming among us and without watching the processes of building, without seeking the advice of his more favored fellows, would begin laying one stone upon another without listening them together with mortar? Why, you would say he is a fool, because he is building a house that is apt to be blown down upon his head. Yet we are in that very same condition as Latter-day Saints. We are inexperienced in many things. We need instruction from God and from His servants, and yet without seeking that instruction we are building houses that the first wind will blow down about our ears. When you do not understand a subject, do not understand a labor that you have got to perform, is it not natural for you to go to those who have information and seek to gain it? This is common in worldly affairs. Should it be less common in spiritual things? If the day ever comes when all the people are prophets, and upon all the people there rests the Spirit of God in its fullness, it will be unnecessary perhaps for you to seek counsel as much as you ought to do now. But I do not believe the day will never come, in time or in eternity, when we will be from under the supervision and the counsel of persons who are over us—of our Heavenly Father, and our earthly fathers, for that matter, if they live according to the laws of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Closely allied with this principle of seeking counsel is that of obedience; for if we seek counsel only to disregard it, better that we do not seek it, because we rest under great condemnation if we turn aside from the truth after it has been presented to us. The obedience which is required in the Church should be first taught in the home, at the fireside—obedience of wives to husbands, in righteousness; obedience of children to parents, in righteousness. The inspiration which a father can give, if he lives right, to his wife and his children will prompt them to follow him from love of him rather than from fear of him. There should be a love in the home that will close the woman's mouth against slander, either of her kindred or of her friends; that will never allow her to say a word against the character or the reputation of him who is placed to be her head; that will never allow her to open her mouth in the presence of her children to revile or to speak harshly of their father or against a neighbor improperly. Obedience is discouraged rather than established in many homes through a lack of ordinary wisdom on the part of fathers and mothers. At one time they will assail the characters of their brethren and sisters in the presence of those little untrained, untaught minds, sowing seeds of distrust and hatred that all the after life of these children will not remove. That, they do this with their fellow Church members; then they do it with each other; and in after years when these seeds have been sown and watered, cultivated and grown to strength, the parents are surprised at the lack of obedience on the part of their sons and daughters, and at their wanderings, their falsehoods and the other evils that afflict the rising generation of this age. Go back to the source of the trouble; go back to the beginning of this evil, and reproach not your fathers and mothers. Let your mouths never utter a word of evil against your fellow-men in the presence of those children for whose training you are responsible. If you cannot speak well of your kindred and your friends, rather keep your mouths closed than to injure yourself and also place sin upon your offspring. Obedience in the family should be cultivated, should be encouraged by every word and act. I am glad to say that there are some young men and women who are just as obedient to their fathers and mothers as the smallest child is. They do not participate in that feeling which is more prevalent than just; that the place for the father and mother, the aged ones, is in the chimney corner, and not in the social gatherings of the youth.

You find among the Latter-day Saints a desire on the part of the young to congregate together, and to debar from their associations the aged—their fathers and their mothers. Why is it? Is it because they have evil in their hearts? I trust not. But the suspicion has crossed. The happiest parties that I ever remember attending in my childhood are those where our aged brethren and sisters gathered with the young people and gave them leaves from their experience—leaves that inspired faith, narratives that encouraged hope and trust in God. I have heard, and very recently, young people remark—young people, too, who are of the most faithful parents—that they will not attend such and such a gathering, because the old people are going to be there. Our aged brethren and sisters may not be as polished as some of these intelligent (according to their own ideas) young people who live now; but where did you get your polish? Where did you get your intellectual strength? Where did you get the knowledge and the power of which you boast? You got them through the sacrifices of your fathers and mothers, through their efforts in your behalf, and their faithfulness before God, which has drawn down the blessings of heaven upon you as well as upon them. When you go before the Master you may be sure that you will have to give an account of the treatment you have rendered to your fathers and mothers. You will be under their supervision and direction for years, to a certain extent, in that world as you should be here. I admired the remark of one very nice young lady of this city, made only a few weeks ago in talking about her prospects of marriage and women who insisted in bringing men among her sisters, boys she, "I will not marry any man unless my parents consent to it." "What! not if you love him not if your whole being seems to be wrapped on in him?" "No," says she, "I will not do it whatever my personal feelings may be; I will respect my parents; I shall not marry him." She had acquired confidence in the judgment and in the righteousness of her parents. It spoke volumes for the training she had received in her home, and it bespeaks blessings for her in this life and in eternity.

You teach your children to be obedient and faithful to you, and you will find those children obedient to the Gospel and to the Priesthood of God. There will be no difficulty in controlling them, no trouble bringing them into the line of their duty. They will be really under all circumstances to answer the requirements that are made of them. Disobedience is one great cause of the troubles which have arisen in the Church in the past, and it will be the cause of greater troubles in the future unless it is overcome. In the days of Nauvoo, when men were called upon missions, they were not asked as to their circumstances; they were simply called and they were expected to go to the nations of the earth to preach the Gospel without warning, and if they did not have money to pay their passage they walked, just as one brother did here a few months ago—started from our city on foot to fill a mission in Europe, with a courage that knew no danger, a faithfulness that could not be overcome. That is the kind of men who established this Church. That is the kind of women—women of faith, who, when their husbands felt them wanted to leave them a single cay and without clothing to keep them warm, would sew up their husbands upon the back and so cheer them to magnify their callings. That is the kind of men and women that laid the foundations of this work, deep and strong—so deep and so strong that they will never be uprooted until the consummation of all things. One Elder who hesitated in the days of Joseph to answer to a call to go upon a mission was told by the Prophet to go or be dismissed. That was the word to him. No hesitation was allowed. What was that a threat to his person? No, it was a threat greater than to his person; it was a revelation of what would be the result in his disobedience. He accepted the mission, and performed a faithful one, too. There was no thought or disobedience at that time. Now people are asked as to their condition. It is well enough perhaps that it is so. I do not complain of it. The people are in different circumstances. But I still believe that there should be sufficient faith in the hearts of the people of God that if they are called upon missions and they cannot obtain means to pay their passages, they should answer that call and travel without purse and scrip, trusting in God to provide for their necessities. With such a spirit in the people as this we will find a courageous race growing up in these mountains. Speaking of that, I want to say that I sometimes feel humiliated at the spirit manifested by Elders of this Church, who are afraid to do what is right because of the fear of public opinion. Public opinion is a good thing, because it often restrains the vile and the corrupt from doing things which would injure the community. But every Latter-day Saint should feel like the old Commodore who was told or what the result would be in the public mind concerning the course which he had determined to take. He said, "The public be damned." If we know a thing is right, we should do it regardless of the consequences, trusting in God to bring good out of what sometimes appears to be evil. Do you think if public opinion had controlled the world we would have reached the place we now occupy? No, we would not, nor by any means. The Savior would not have come forth establishing a new order of things among the Jews; Luther would not have risen as he did in the dark ages to call a halt against the iniquities of the great mother church; Joseph Smith would not have received to the world the Gospel that God gave to him. If these men had been governed and controlled by public opinion, the Church would not have been established, and we could not have been in the condition we are now. If public opinion had restrained men, Fulton would never have launched his ship on the Hudson river; Stephenson would never have sought to drive his engine over the road, to the Second the miracle of the English people; Morse as he pleaded with Congress for an appropriation with which to construct a telegraph line from Washington to Baltimore, would have been restrained and would have faltered in the great mission that God had given him to do. But these men were inspired by the spirit which He dispenses among His children, and in the face of ridicule, in the face of the public, they persisted in the duty that God assigned them, and the world is made better and purer and higher by their nobility of soul.

If Latter-day Saints are inspired as they should be, there is nothing that will cause them to tremble or to fear the power of man. I have seen weak women, who seemed almost incapable of moving, and yet with the Spirit of God in their souls they have faced the world, their friends and their kindred, have faced what seemed death to them, because they were determined to serve God and keep His commandments. We want in this day men and women of courage who whenever they know what is right will do it, even though they know their lives will be required for the establishment of that which they know to be right. If the people of the Latter-day Saints are possessed of any other spirit than this, they have not got the spirit of the Gospel in their souls. We want to be a race of men and women who have views of our own, who have characters established, who have unfloinching faith and unchangeable integrity, men and women, as we already have the reputation of being, who can face a frowning world without any fear of the consequences of the conflict which may ensue. And this does not imply that we should be slaves, in any sense of the word, to the Priesthood of God; for obedience to the Priesthood makes us independent; it gives us intelligence, wisdom, strength both with men and with God.

While I have spoken of the changed conditions that exist today from what they were in the early rise of the Church, do not misunderstand me, my brethren and sisters. I do not mean that we should return to old conditions, except as those conditions will result in our exaltation and blessing. Because the railroad did not cross the plains when the emigrants came to this country, I would not say to the Latter-day Saints, "You should go in ox teams and with handcarts from here to Omaha or Council Bluffs." Nor be progressive men and women. Note the truth that God is dispensing among his children as liberally in this day. Open your minds and your hearts to receive gems; for every item of intelligence and knowledge that mankind has received is the gift of God. He is true Himself, and everything that He gives to us is true, and is intelligence and wisdom. Go on in the path of progress, of wisdom, of learning. In second to no people upon the face of the earth in the acquirement of the arts and graces of mankind. But above all things, I implore you, as I do myself, to keep burning within our hearts faith in God that will give us eternal wisdom and eternal riches, and the love of the Gospel that will make us as one great family in the service of God. Amen.

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