

FIFTY-FOURTH SEMI-ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

The Fifty-Fourth Semi-Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the large Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Oct. 4th, 1884.

Present on the stand:—Of the First Presidency, John Taylor, George Q. Cannon.

Of the Twelve Apostles, Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, Erastus Snow, Franklin D. Richards, Brigham Young, Albert Carrington, Moses Thatcher, Francis Marion Lyman, George Teasdale, Heber J. Grant and John W. Taylor.

Counselor to the Twelve, Daniel H. Wells.

Patriarch of the Church, John Smith. Of the First Seven Presidents of Seventies, Horace S. Eldredge, Abram H. Cannon and Seymour B. Young.

Of the Presiding Bishopric, William B. Preston and Robert T. Burton.

Also a number of Presidents of Stakes, Bishops and Elders from various parts of Utah and surrounding States and Territories.

Conference was called to order by President John Taylor.

The choir sang:—

Hail to the brightness of Zion's glad morning!

Joy to the lands that in darkness have lain!

Opening prayer by Apostle Franklin D. Richards.

Softly beams the sacred dawning
Of the great Millennial morn.

Was sung by the choir.

PRESIDENT JOHN TAYLOR

Said we are met this morning to attend our Semi-Annual Conference, and to attend to the various kinds of business that may be presented to us, associated with the interests of the kingdom of God on the earth. We have met for this purpose for a great many years, and have enjoyed ourselves generally very much on such occasions. Being gathered to hear and to speak, and to present doctrines, principles and business, it is proper for us to thank God the Eternal Father and seek for his guidance and blessings in all things we may engage in. We occupy a peculiar position among the nations, and associated with this nation. It is proper for us to seek to comprehend our relationship to our Heavenly Father and Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant and heavenly intelligences, and the relationship we sustain to each other, and the kingdom of God on the earth, and understand the various duties devolving upon us in connection with the Church, this nation and all other nations, to whom we have a message to deliver. We must also seek to understand all the duties of life. People are gathered here from all the States. The representatives of the people should always be present on these occasions, especially the Presidents of Stakes, Bishops and Counselors, High Counselors and the officers of the Church generally, that they, and through them the people of Zion, may be instructed in regard to all the leading principles developed on these occasions.

On account of the weather being inclement not many are present. The old people, however, are well represented, and it is to be presumed the younger ones are stopping at home to take care of themselves. When they get older they will probably learn better. We are living in peculiar times and the position of the Latter-day Saints is a singular one. This is the dispensation of the fullness of times, when all things in heaven and on earth are to be gathered together in one. The principles of salvation in this dispensation are and will continue to be more clearly taught in this than in any former dispensation. The Lord has initiated it by opening the heavens. He is gathering to Himself a people, to whom He has revealed things that have been hidden from the beginning. All His promises will be fulfilled both in regard to the living and the dead. Our duties embrace all conditions connected with human life past, present and future. God has greatly blessed us in our settlements, and continues to increase us year after year, and we feel to rejoice in the God of Israel.

There is in the world and this nation strong hatred to us as a people, and we have to endure persecution, reproach and falsehood set on foot to injure us. Yet these things make but little difference to us. We know in whom we believe and that God has set his hand to accomplish his purposes in the last days; no power can stay His work. As regards other people and their ideas it matters but little to us. Although they show a disposition to break the Constitution and bring us into vassalage, God has maintained our freedom, and if we do right He will continue to do so. We are commanded to preach the Gospel. This has been done and thousands inspired by the fear of God have gathered here in consequence. And the Lord has blessed us in our gathering together; in our houses, orchards, gardens, fields, flocks and the labor of our hands. Although we have some settlements which have suffered from floods the crops throughout are generally good and the granaries are full to running over. God's mercy has been manifested unto us. There is generally manifested among the people a desire to act as becomes Saints of the Most High God. We feel grateful unto the God of heaven for his mercy. There is occasionally a complaint that the brethren have a large amount of grain and it fetches a low

price, and embarrassments arise from this situation. But we may have worse things than plenty of wheat, cattle, sheep and other substances. There are thousands of happy homes and families, with as good prospects as are before any other people in existence. Jesus said his disciples are known by the love they bear each other. It applies to the Saints now. While contentions exist elsewhere we do not have them, for the Lord is teaching us a better way. There have been times when we did not have much substance to trouble us to take care of. A visit paid by the speaker and others to the northern settlements, on which occasion a distance of a thousand miles was traversed, and a most satisfactory condition found to exist. A similar report comes from the south. It is desired that the people preserve themselves in all purity, and that all may operate together in the building up of Zion, teaching our children the principles of life, continuing our labors until the will of God is done on the earth as it is done in heaven. President Taylor concluded by expressing his pleasure at meeting with the people, and desiring the blessing of God upon the Conference.

APOSTLE WILFORD WOODRUFF

Said it is a consolation to know that we are engaged in the work of God; to live in this day when the eternal Priesthood has been committed to men, and when there is an organized Church of Christ on the earth. We should be thankful for the privileges we enjoy in this connection. But few people comparatively of any age have been ready to receive the testimony of Jesus Christ and receive His Gospel. It is a narrow path to walk in. As we have learned, no man can live Godly in Christ Jesus without suffering persecution. There has never been a more unpopular doctrine among humanity than that incorporated in the Gospel. Almost eighteen hundred years elapsed subsequent to the days of the ancient church established by Christ without any one having the privilege of beholding the face of a directly authorized servant of God. His authority has been again restored, however, and the command has been given to go forth and prune his vineyard for the last time. We occupy a different position from that of any people to whom a dispensation was ever committed. Each formerly has been dispelled—driven from the earth—because of the hold Satan has had over the hearts of men, but this dispensation cannot be removed. A promise has been given that it shall remain until the purposes of the Most High in relation to the earth and its inhabitants have been consummated.

We have been ordained of God to build temples, go therein and redeem our dead. This appears to be a special feature of this work, so far at least as its extent is concerned. We have had considerable experience in the organization of the Priesthood in its various ramifications. We have the various quorums in their order, and in the several organizations the brethren should meet often together and instruct each other in the duties of their callings. All men in their several capacities should improve their time and talents, that the power of God may be increased. The Word of Wisdom should be obeyed. The Spirit of God will not dwell in unholy temples. We are held responsible for the declaration of the Gospel to the Gentiles first and then to the House of Israel. We have gone to nearly every nation where openings could be made for the introduction of the Gospel, and our efforts must not be slackened. There are the Lamanites, who are a fallen and degraded people. God has given us a knowledge of the history of their forefathers. We have endeavored to teach them to reform from shedding the blood of their fellowmen, and those instructions have had a salutary effect upon them. It is our duty to teach them both by precept and example. After the Gentiles entirely turn from the Gospel it will be taken to the Jews. How long it will be before that will take place does not appear. God has, as stated by President Taylor, greatly blessed us, and we should dedicate our entire substance to the Lord. We are all on this earth on missions, and we have no other legitimate business than to build up the Kingdom of God, concerning the glorious future of which we have no doubt, as it will prevail and stand forever, in accordance with the predictions of the prophets. The speaker continued to speak for some time upon the free agency of man and the promises of God to the faithful.

Now let us rejoice in the day of salvation.

No longer as strangers on earth need we roam.

Adjourned till 2 p. m.

Benediction by Apostle Lorenzo Snow.

Afternoon session.

O, awake! my slumbering minstrel,
Let my harp forget its spell.

was sung by the choir. Prayer by Apostle Brigham Young.

The choir sang:

We're not ashamed to own our Lord,
And worship Him on earth.

APOSTLE LORENZO SNOW

Addressed the Conference. He read a passage in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, beginning on page 224, in which fasting and prayer or rejoicing and prayer are spoken of and certain blessings of the fullness of the earth

promised to the Saints on condition of their obedience. He also read a passage beginning on page 189, which predicts that eventually all who do not take their sword against their neighbor among the wicked, will have to flee to Zion for safety; and described the gathering to it of people from every nation under heaven. He next quoted from the hymn beginning: "Hushed, be the accents of sorrow and mourning, Zion in triumph begins her glad reign," and proceeded to speak in substance as follows: We may be profited this afternoon, as on all similar occasions, it is necessary to place our minds in a condition of faith and prayer, that we may have the Spirit that takes of the things of God and makes them clearly manifest. The quotations made were suggested by the discourse delivered by President Taylor this morning. In each dispensation the Lord has exhibited the special blessings he designed to bestow upon the particular people to whom the revelations were given. All that was necessary to bring about the reception of those blessings was compliance with the conditions upon which their bestowal rested. Opposition would not prevent the giving of promised blessings; neither would any other condition, except a failure to obey the laws upon which they are predicated, on the part of the people to whom the promises were made. The experience of the children of Israel in Egypt was an illustration of this truth. The Lord promised them deliverance, and notwithstanding all the forces brought to bear against the accomplishment of the work of freeing them, the Lord so arranged matters that it was attained. It was so also in the days of the Savior when He set up the Church. He gave certain directions to his disciples, the carrying out of which, according to the promise, was to bring certain peculiar blessings. There were all kinds of opposition to cause the promises of God to be of no effect, but the blessings flowed whenever the requisite conditions were complied with. Gamaliel in that day counseled the people not to oppose the disciples lest they be found fighting against God; that if the work were not of divine origin it would be brought to nought, whereas if otherwise it could not be prevailed against. This was excellent advice and incorporated a true principle.

The time has been in the history of the Latter-day Saints when it appeared as if nothing but starvation stared them in the face, yet the promises incorporated in the quotations made were before them, and the promises of the Almighty never failed. Many of the Saints in Europe have been in the most distressing and unpromising circumstances, and with no earthly prospects of deliverance, but the promises of the Lord were that He would gather them to Zion where they would be prospered, and how wonderfully these things have been fulfilled. All this has been done by the power of the Almighty. It could not have been done by the unaided power of man. This is not the most important point God has accomplished. Before we were reached by the servants of God we were in spiritual bondage, we knew not our relationship to the Almighty nor the nature of our earthly mission. Our minds have been illuminated in relation to heavenly things. We received the Holy Ghost through obedience, and this gave us an assurance of the divine character of the message we had received. We felt that there had been a divine recognition of the administration of the ordinances which we received at the hands of the Elders. We were established upon the rock of revelation, every man and woman knowing of the doctrine for him or herself. The nation and nations may make an effort to destroy the Church; and a Gamaliel might arise and with good ground give the same advice as was tendered by him of olden time. We see that God has fulfilled His promises He has made to us, and our faith extends into the eternities, embodying the assurance of a glorious and everlasting reunion of the closest associations formed in this life.

There is no need of cultivating a feeling of fear in regard to our future, but it would be well for the nations to take heed how they oppose this work. Every attempt in that direction thus far has failed. An attempt has been made to stop the immigration from abroad, which signally failed. An effort has also been made to stop the increase of the Latter-day Saints in other ways, but no power on earth can accomplish this, and the flocks of intelligent children will continue to grace our homes and assemblages.

APOSTLE ERASTUS SNOW

was the next speaker. He said in substance: For about five weeks passed he had been visiting the Saints in the States in Utah, Colorado and Arizona. The people are generally in a peaceful, healthful and prosperous condition, dwelling together in unity and love, without anything to mar their peace except some destruction from floods in the San Juan country and some persecution from unprincipled persons in Apache County, Arizona. It has been instituted for political purposes. It will have the effect probably of establishing the righteous more firmly in the faith of the Gospel and weeding out the unfaithful. Many improvements have been made in the South, and the climate has apparently modified. Openings are plentiful for new settlers and land can be obtained on easy terms. Grain, vegetables and fruit of excellent quality are raised in abundance. At Woodruff especially more help is needed.

The climate is unsurpassed by any other. At St. Joseph the United Order is conducted successfully according to stewardships.

The speaker continued to give interesting details about the country occupied by the Saints in the outlying settlements, and as a synopsis would not give an adequate idea of that portion of his discourse, the account is left for a verbatim report which will appear in due time.

Taking up another line of remarks he spoke of the opposition with which the Saints have to contend. It is remarkable that one class of the human family prey upon another as wolves prey upon lambs. The spirit of the Gospel causes men to be gentle, in accordance with the symbol by which the Holy Ghost was manifested when bestowed upon the Savior, being in the form of a dove. Christ was called the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the World. He exhibited the spirit of submission in his course on the earth, yet, as He said to His disciples, He had the power to call twelve legions of angels to his aid. But he knew that this would not be according to the Father's will. So has He commanded the Latter-day Saints to have faith in the overruling providence of God. The highest type of humility and patience is exhibited by the Saints, and the greatest extremes of ferocity and hate are manifested by their enemies, and all these things are necessary for the carrying out of the purposes of the Almighty and the purifying of His people; also that those who choose evil rather than good may be eventually consigned to their place. We can afford to take persecution joyfully seeing that we have come to an understanding of the object of our earthly existence. We should take to heart the injunction of Christ, not to lay up treasures on earth, but prefer to seek heavenly riches. This does not imply that the people should be restrained from attending to the wants of the body, but the entire attention should not be absorbed by those things that pertain merely to temporalities. It is necessary to cultivate that love that looks charitably upon the acts of others, and seeks to do good and no evil, exemplifying the characteristics of the dove and the lamb.

The speaker continued to dwell for some time upon the necessity of industry, administering a settling rebuke to those inclined to idleness. He spoke of the increase of the children of the Saints, and said the people might have to pass through trying ordeals on account of the wickedness of those who sought their destruction, but if so the result would be ultimate salvation and glory to those who endured to the end and maintained their integrity to the truth.

The choir sang:

O ye mountains high, where the clear blue sky
Arches over the vales of the free.

Adjourned till Sunday, Oct. 5th.
Benediction by Apostle Albert Carrington.

SECOND DAY.

Sunday, April 5th, 10 a. m.

See how the morning sun
Pursues his shining way.

Was sung by the choir.

"Come, follow me," the Savior said;
Then let us in His footsteps tread.

APOSTLE FRANKLIN D. RICHARDS.

He quoted from the book of Doctrine and Covenants, beginning at verse 25, on page 250, and ending at verse 33, showing the mind of the Lord regarding the responsibility of parents in instructing their children, the keeping of the Sabbath, and the law in relation to idlers in Zion.

He also read from the same book, Section 29, from verse 46 to 48, inclusive, concerning the unconditional redemption of little children who die before reaching the years of accountability, and their sinlessness and freedom from the temptation of Satan until they arrive at that condition.

He then proceeded with his discourse, which was substantially as follows:

Referring to our little children, who are becoming a mighty host, I will make a few remarks. In early days our increase was largely made up by our immigration from distant parts of the world. That sort of addition has somewhat decreased of late years, and it now depends to a greater extent upon the children who are multiplied to the people of God. We should benefit by our experiences. There is a feeling in the world to treat children with indifference, but this is decreasing among the Saints. Our Savior said, when it was evinced that some considered children of lesser importance than grown people, "suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." Those who have attended our Sabbath schools and heard the little ones recite have rejoiced to witness the early germinations of intelligence exhibited by them. The same can be said in relation to the juvenile exercises at the meetings of the primary associations. Jesus said "their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." They are unblemished by sin. When Christ visited the Nephites on this continent, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, he caused the power of God to be made manifest through the children and they spoke wonderful words

of wisdom. Our children will, many of them, yet be prophets, seers and revelators, and judges in Israel. As has been said, children are not susceptible to temptation by Satan, until they reach the years of accountability. We cannot begin to instruct them at a too early stage of their lives, and they should be duly prepared by instruction to receive intelligently the ordinances of baptism by immersion and the laying on of the hands by the Elders for the reception of the Holy Ghost. They should be taught to venerate the principles of the Gospel in early childhood, so that when the time of responsibility is reached they may take hold of them heartily. It should be a leading effort to preserve people in purity throughout their lives, and this can be the more closely reached by laying a proper foundation in the early portion of human existence. It is recorded that little children who depart this life before reaching the years of accountability are taken into the presence of God, and that they will inherit a celestial glory. The Prophet Joseph even taught that some of them are so precious and holy that the Father takes them hence, rather than allow them to remain to come under the many adverse conditions to be met with in this life. In view of these truths, is it not extraordinary that parents will turn over their children to people who are opposed to the principles of salvation to be taught in such a way as to wean them from the path of eternal life? Those teachers find that members of the Church who are matured in the truth cannot be turned away from it, and they admit that their only hope lies in winning the children to their views.

In relation to the initiatory ordinances of the Gospel, the Elders go abroad and preach, people believe and are baptized, for the remission of sins and have hands laid upon them that they may secure the Holy Ghost, and through those ordinances the power of God is made manifest. There is one ordinance, however, that has been generally neglected. The Lord had commanded that when a house, town, county or other place is visited by the Elders and they are received their peace should be pronounced, and if they are rejected they should go privately, wash their feet and witness to their Father in Heaven that they have delivered their message and borne testimony concerning the Gospel. It is not necessary that the Elders should enter into contentions with people opposed to them, neither should they expose themselves to destruction at the hands of the wicked, but do as the Lord has commanded in those things; not openly, however, for such a course would doubtless cause bitterness and hate to be increased toward them among the ungodly.

The speaker made some clear and instructive remarks in relation to finding work for the unemployed and the carrying of the Gospel to the nations of the earth. He showed clearly how those who were too aged or otherwise disabled from going out into the world and preaching, could render themselves specially useful in one important department—looking after the interests of the immigrants who come here by helping them to establish themselves in accordance with the customs and conditions of the country.

PREST. GEORGE Q. CANNON

Read a portion of the 29th Chapter of Isaiah, and continuing said: This work which God predicted by the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah, the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon and its being presented to a learned and an unlearned man, and the causing of the wisdom of the wise men to come to naught, have all been remarkably fulfilled before our eyes, and this is not less the case respecting the confusion of those who should fight against Mount Zion. As that which has been predicted and has been fulfilled in the past are facts well known to us, we can believe that that which is predicted but not yet fulfilled also assuredly will be. The work was commenced in obscurity and was born according to the will of God, with no special demonstration which should attract the attention of the world. Our own commencement as human beings on the earth was of a similar type, yet a puny, helpless infant may become a God in the eternities of our Father. The commencement of the Church was obscure and insignificant, and it required faith in those who were its early members to believe that it would ever attain that position and strength which were predicted for it. The Prophet Joseph, however, and his associates saw by vision that which we now behold and participate in, and much more which we, if we behold it at all, must see by the Spirit. Scarcely a step or a circumstance has taken place in the Church that was not known to and spoken of by Joseph Smith. Yet men doubt his divine calling as a prophet and hold up his name to scorn and ridicule, still it is not too much to say that before many years have passed away, he will be recognized as one of the mightiest prophets that ever trod the footstool of God. His life and character have not been understood in the past, but they will be more fully in the future. In the very beginning he told of the hatred with which the church would be met. He told of events that should occur as clearly as if he were reading the account of events which had already taken place. As the influence and extent of the work increased, opposition