

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

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At the Fifty-Eighth General Conference, in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, on Sunday, April 8th, 1898.

Being requested by President Snow to occupy a little time this afternoon, I will take the liberty to read a few verses contained in the 8th chapter of the First Book of Nephi, in the Book of Mormon. It is a dream or vision, that was had by the ancient prophet and patriarch, Lehi, who led forth a company consisting of his family and others, from the city of Jerusalem, about 600 years before Christ; and, being led by the power of God, was landed on the west shores of this (American) continent. This aged veteran, in his experience, has left on record the following dream or vision—which is found in the eighth chapter of First Nephi, commencing with the 5th verse.

5. And it came to pass that I saw a man, and he was dressed in a white robe: and he came and stood before me.
6. And it came to pass that he spake unto me, and bade me follow him.
7. And it came to pass that as I followed him, I beheld myself that I was in a dark and dreary waste.
8. And after I had travelled for the space of many hours in darkness, I began to pray unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies.
9. And it came to pass that after I prayed unto the Lord, I beheld a large and spacious field.
10. And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.
11. And it came to pass that I did go forth, and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.
12. And as I partook of the fruit thereof, it filled my soul with exceeding great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit.
13. And as I cast my eyes round about, that perhaps I might discover my family also, I beheld a river of water; and it ran along, and it was near the tree of which I was partaking the fruit.

19. And I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood.
20. And I also beheld a straight and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree by which I stood; and it also led by the head of the fountain, unto a large and spacious field, as if it had been a world.
21. And I saw numberless concourses of people; many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood.
22. And it came to pass that they did come forth, and commenced in the path which led to the tree.
23. And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceeding great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path, did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.
24. And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.

It might seem quite preposterous for me to think of instructing and edifying this vast congregation in regard to anything I know of myself or any gift of mine by which I might endeavor to do so. But if the Saints shall exercise their faith and inclinations it may be, peradventure, that the Holy Spirit shall rest upon us, and that we may be edified together.

It seems as though the flood of light and instruction that has been poured out during this Conference upon the people, which has been quite becoming and refreshing from the presence of God—that of those who have heard these instructions, and have sought to take them in and be profited thereby, they would be sufficient to satisfy any honest seekers after truth, in regard to the principles of life and salvation, and enable him or them to lay hold of the rod of iron, and follow it to the source of the river of life. Commencing with the first principles of faith, repentance and baptism, and coming on, even, to baptism confirmation and administration for the dead, which have brought us, in our reflection and meditation, to a sense of union with our fathers and mothers that have gone before us, we have had poured out to us the precious things of the Kingdom of God, which are calculated to stir up in the hearts of the righteous a firm inclination to adhere to the principles of the Gospel, yea, to hold on to the rod of iron.

This vision that was here seen, though it applied to the people who received it, and to the new land to which they were going, still the circumstances attendant upon them were in some respects so analogous to the circumstances of the present day, that it seems to me that from this lesson we may derive profit and be strengthened in our work and induced to hold firmly to this rod of iron that is here spoken of. We are informed in the Revelation to St. John that the Lord shall subdue all things and put all things under His feet, that "He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels

of a potter shall they be broken to shivers;" and this "rod of iron" as Nephi explains in the 25th chapter and 24th verse, is the word of God, so that in regard to this expression there need be no misunderstanding. Now, in this vision which I have read, you will notice that the Prophet saw a great many going along trying to walk in that straight and narrow path, but some of them got out of it, and you will recollect he says that there arose an exceeding great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path lost their way; so that the only chance they had to keep in the right path was to hang on to the rod of iron, otherwise, if that rod was near the edge of the river, they might tumble into the river and be cut off from the direct way.

The Prophet Nephi further says in the same connection that "whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction, wherefore Nephi did exhort his brethren to give heed unto the word of the Lord: with all the energies of his soul, and with all the faculty which he possessed they would give heed to the word of God, and remember to keep His commandments in all things.

Now, it occurs to my mind that, in our own day, right here in Salt Lake City there is great need for many, yea, for all of us, to cling tight unto this rod of iron which is the word of God. One of the ancient apostles in speaking of this says to the brethren: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." From this saying we are led to understand that they who had embraced the Gospel, those who had been born of the water and the spirit, had a sure word of prophecy, to which they must take heed. This "day dawn" and the "day star" that was to arise in their hearts was that principle which is spoken of in another scripture where it says: "The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." This was of peculiar importance to the Saints as well as to the apostles anciently especially when some were being killed—and others scattered in different parts of the earth. It was of special importance to them that they should have the spirit of God, which is the spirit of revelation, within them; it might be a source of light and an anchor to their souls continually.

Now, I ask, have we not also received this holy anointing, and if we have, are not these same blessings promised to us, even all who keep His commandments? And inasmuch as we cultivate these blessings by constant obedience are we not precious in the eyes of God? We are told in the Scriptures that His children are precious in His sight, as the apple of His eye. Suppose then, that each one undertakes himself, and adopts the process recommended in the epistle which was read yesterday. Suppose we "wash our eyes with eye salve," and judge ourselves in that manner which is contemplated by the Apostle, namely, that we judge ourselves so that we need be judged by no man. Is it not better to judge ourselves and put away all that is unworthy in our lives and claim this great blessing which is promised by virtue of the holy anointing? Is not this our right and privilege? Do we not feel the need of more of the spirit of revelation in these times of doubt and uncertainty? Is it not better, I repeat, to judge ourselves and put ourselves in a position to receive these blessings at the hands of God one and all of us? We should then be in a position to get knowledge and intelligence of the Lord in all things as we might need. It is obedience to the will of God that brings His friendship and His blessings.

In the early settlement of these valleys, when each Sabbath we ate and drank at the table of the Lord—union, peace and love to each other and the Lord—all was pleasant even in our deep poverty. Now in the face of all the opposition that we meet it is not quite so easy to be a Saint in some respects. It is easy for a mariner to guide his ship in a fair wind but in a hurricane and rough sea he requires all the skill he possesses. So with the ship Zion, at the time all may be pleasant. Behold we have been gathered together from the four quarters of the earth. Many have come here not for the truth's sake, but to better their condition temporally. I would like to bear my testimony here, of the great work and excellence of the institution that has helped so many to gather to this country. Presidents Brigham Young and John Taylor well managed its affairs as benefactors of our race, and rendered it very efficient to bring many thousands here.

In our scooping in the net, we were not then able to discern those that were good from those that were bad. The Savior said when the net was cast into the sea, that it was likened unto the kingdom of God, it brought all sorts of fish to the shore, and we find it to be true. The good will be put into vessels, the bad will be cast away. There are some people here, who being traitors, betray their

brethren and sisters—men whom it would have been better if they had never come to this land—or perhaps better still if they had not been born—some of them. And these, together with the enemies of Zion, who have come up against the people of God, are doing their utmost to make things very unpleasant among us.

Darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people, because they have transgressed the laws, and they have broken the everlasting covenant; therefore hath a curse devoured the earth, and it is devouring it.

Now, then, let us look at this darkness a little. The prophet, Lehi, said he beheld in this vision that there was great darkness that he was led into, and he saw how difficult it was to get through, and out of it, into the light again. Indeed, he found the only way to get through was by clinging to the rod of iron.

This is characteristic of the Saints always, that while they love the light they fear not the darkness, while they have the spirit and power of God with them.

We are reminded of one of the early hymns that used to be sung,

"We want no cowards in our band that will their colors fly,
We call for valiant-hearted men, who're not afraid to die."

These are the kind we have been seeking for and have found a great many; still, while gathering them, we have had to bring others with them. The wheat and the tares are so mixed up and have grown together, that if we pull up the tares, we will be very apt to pull some of the wheat also; so we'll wait until the harvest, and the angels will gather the wheat in the garner, and the tares into bundles to be burned in the due time of the Lord.

But concerning this darkness, now, I know that a good many of the Saints are put about over these things—their athers are taken off to prison, their husbands are dragged away, and they themselves are humbled in the dust by reason of the inquisition that seems to take possession of them and their most sacred relations. Consequently, there is a sad feeling and sorrow gets into the minds of some, but we tell you it is in these times that the test comes to the increase of our faith.

There is such a thing as walking in the twilight, when your light does not burn very bright; but your eyes become adapted to the light and you can see to walk steadily without stumbling, even if it be not in the full light of the Son of Righteousness. But by and by that glorious Son will come in the fullness of His splendor.

The dawning of that day has come. We are walking in the light of it, but when the Sun of Righteousness shall come and dwell upon the earth, the righteous will have a fullness of His glory.

Did you ever walk out in a dark night when the vivid lightning flashed, and the pealing thunder rolled over your heads, when it was so dark you could not see a step before you? When the glare of light came you could see what was but a few steps ahead and could go a short distance in safety? When another flash of light still further illuminated your pathway, until the storm had passed and you were enabled to pursue your way steadily in an even though perhaps not the brightest light. So with the experience and trials of the Saints; though the storm may beat upon us, the ungodly hovers around us and thick darkness may exist and threaten destruction of property and life, still between there will come to those who are true and faithful, these manifestations, from time to time, that will show them from one step to the next the way to Tree of Life. Lehi saw in his vision "an exceeding great mist of darkness, insomuch that many who commenced in the narrow path did lose their way and wandered off and were lost, while those who clung to the rod of iron made their way safely to the Tree and partook of its fruit."

Herein, my brethren, is where we come to the trial of our faith, though not so much a trial of our faith perhaps, as of our integrity to the truth.

Some feel their weakness, and are a little shaky when they see our great government is taking away our property—the hard earnings of our labor and the toil of forty years—and, in the midst of this confusion and jar, wonder what the outcome will be. Suppose we should be stripped of our possessions by unscrupulous agencies, our frugality, temperance, industry and faith in God would soon enable us to place ourselves on a better basis of wealth than we ever before enjoyed. We could scarcely be brought to a lower condition in that respect than when we arrived in these valleys and exist. My brethren and sisters, God has given us indubitable promises; such unqualified assurances, that He would establish His kingdom in this dispensation, and that it shall never be given to another people, but that He will deal with His Saints, discipline and prepare them, so that they will have that assurance and confidence that they will never doubt, and when Satan comes around and tries to disturb their confidence and unsettle their integrity, they would say, "Get thee behind me, Satan. It is written, Thou shalt serve the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." And as for me and mine, we will serve the Lord. Therefore, I say to you, my brethren and sisters, when you are troubled with any manner of griefs or afflictions and are depressed, do not forget your God. Get away into your secret places and pray unto Him, and do not allow

yourselves to be diverted from the right way of the Lord, but move carefully, and by and by these clouds will have passed away, the light will come. Then, oh! how thankful you will be if you have not said or done anything that you will have to be sorry for, and that would take you, perhaps, years to recover from. I would like, if I could, to say a word to strengthen the brethren in these times, so that they may feel encouraged and invigorated to go on their way rejoicing.

We should teach our children the right way of the Lord, instruct them to pray and not get in a hurry and neglect these things. When you are sad, then is the time to pray; and when you are joyful sing psalms of praise. Don't forget to acknowledge the hand of the Lord at all times and in all things, then He will order your way in great mercy and His grace shall be sufficient for you. His promises to His children will never fail; though the heavens and earth pass away, still not one jot or tittle of His word shall go unfulfilled. It will go forth and not return void, but shall accomplish the thing whereunto it is sent. Then O, ye Saints, lift up your hearts, be glad and rejoice, although darkness may lower around you and may dwell upon your path for a season! Remember that God has ordained the night, as well as the day, and one is just as important as the other. If the sun shone on the earth all the time it would dry everything up, there would be no moisture which now sustains vegetation, causes the verdure of the earth, and makes its various products agreeable, pleasant and profitable for our use.

We have received during this conference some very incisive suggestions and instructions concerning the course that is being pursued by many of the people. Do we realize, that we live in a day in which all the known forces seem conspiring to hasten the fulfillment of the purposes of God in His great Latter-day work? It is therefore the more essential that we live nearer to Him, and have more of His Spirit, being careful to keep oil in our vessels, having our lamps trimmed and burning brightly that we may see and know how to redeem the time, because the days are evil, and are liable to be more so.

Who can contemplate the many judgments that have spread destruction through the earth during the half century in which the Gospel has been revealed and preached among the nations, the waves of the sea roaring and heaving themselves beyond their bounds, as instanced in China quite recently, when over one and a half million of human beings were reported swept into eternity by a terrible concussion of the elements, or as in India during a famine, when some hundreds of thousands perished. In various other parts where towns, cities and islands have been sunk or been overflooded with all their teeming populations. These, together with the earthquakes, cyclones, pestilences and tornadoes that have visited our own much favored land with their terrible consequences in South Carolina, still fresh in our memories, cannot be contemplated without feeling the evidence that the Lord is following the testimonies of His ministers with His own confirmation of their words, and realizing that it is in fulfillment of His promises.

We have lived in these mountainous forty years and have raised up a new generation. Some of our sons have grown up and become Elders, Bishops, presidents, judges and attorneys. We have another generation that has grown up among us; how much do they realize of what their fathers and mothers, their grandfathers and grandmothers had to pass through to get to these valleys of the mountains and commence to establish homes? Very few, indeed, entertain any realizing sense of the experience their parents had on the plains, or the trouble they had before they left Nauvoo, or the persecutions they endured in the State of Missouri.

It is necessary that our young people should entertain some idea of these things, else how can they appreciate the value of the peaceful and happy homes they are now permitted to enjoy. If our people, young or old, forget God and His great deliverances He knows just how to teach the present generation as He did their parents.

We have come to be a wealthy people. We have among us bankers, merchants, well to do artisans and farmers who are in very comfortable circumstances, so far as this world's goods are concerned. The Lord causes our land to be fruitful and gives us plenty. Now, what I want to draw your attention to is this: While we have abundance given unto us, while we have all we need to sustain life and make us comfortable, does it occur to you that if we do not conduct ourselves so as to preserve the favor of God with us that He can stop the earth from yielding forth its fruit; can close up our mercantile establishments and banks and bankrupt us all? We are in His hands. He can do with us as seemeth Him best. This being so, we should make Him our friend, keep our covenants, and obey His laws; for He can bestow upon us abundantly, or He can, of His own will, permit us to be brought down as low as when we first came to these valleys. But then we need not make any great worriment about that; certainly the old folks will not. I have heard many of them say: "I shall never be afraid of going hungry after this—after crossing the plains and locating in these valleys under the circumstances that we did." But it is within the providence of God, if we

should depart from Him, or forget ourselves and not value and appreciate His blessings, to bring us down from our present prosperous condition. You know He can do it. He has permitted us to get homes in which we could settle down with no one to molest us. If, however, we disregard these homes, and are ready to sell them out to those who hate us, the Lord may chastise us for so doing. It seems as if some of the brethren had said to themselves, "I may as well do as others do," and the best reason that they can give for their course is: "If I do not sell, my neighbor will," just as the man reasoned in regard to putting up a saloon, "If I don't put up a saloon, somebody else will, and I may as well do it as he." It seems as if some of our brethren had actually got scared for fear they could not get rid of their homes, and they have employed intrigue and deception to bring it about. There must come a time when this will have to stop, or the displeasure of the Lord will be incurred upon the people. It is a principle of truth and justice that if men go astray and bring the displeasure of God upon themselves and those around them, they necessarily are accountable for the mischief done, to a certain considerable extent. I recollect well a saying of the Prophet Joseph when there were men laying in wait for him and for his life, and when there were brethren around him who did not know what they were about—he said he had not only to protect himself against the malice of his enemies, but also against the follies of his friends. So it is in these days. We have to protect ourselves, not only against our enemies, but frequently against the folly of our friends who bring trouble needlessly upon us by their unwise conduct and conversation.

There are many things that we might take into consideration. I will mention another one. Not only are we in a condition where the Lord can deal with us in the way that I have mentioned, but let me remind you that while earthquakes, cyclones, terrible convulsions of nature, and the heaving of the sea beyond its bounds are happening in other countries, quite as strange things may happen here. We have been greatly blessed, having experienced but a shock or two of earthquake, with no disastrous consequences; but it may be borne in mind that we are living on a strip of the earth where, from the geysers of the Yellowstone to the tropical region of the West Indies, it is nothing more or less than a line of silent earthquakes and volcanoes. Go down in Dixie and you will find the land for miles around gives evidences of terrible volcanic eruptions in leaving great fissures and craters in the ground. Go north and you will find the same thing. We are living on a portion of the earth where we are liable to be, more than any other place on this hemisphere, subject to these great disasters as chastisements.

I merely refer you to this to show how easy, in the natural course of events it would be for our Heavenly father to bring affliction upon us in our peaceful and happy homes. I do not wish to terrify you into obedience, but to remind you that we are in the hands of God our Father and that He will deal with us in His infinite wisdom. And if we keep His commandments and walk in the way of His judgments and statutes, we need not fear the legislation of Congress, the rulings of judges nor the decision of nations. But we leave that to God. Let Him judge between them and us. He knows how to rebuke strong nations afar off, and how to teach senators wisdom; and He will do it. He will order all these things in His own good way and in His own good time. Armies have already been here in our midst and gone away as harmless as the boys in the Twentieth Ward that were imprisoned by the Federal officers for playing with their wooden swords. We are talking with the nation, and the nation with us, about the principles of the Gospel. We are inquiring to find out as to whether we shall gain our liberties or remain in the condition we are now in. We are not now under Governor Ford, of Illinois, nor the captain of the Carthage Greys. We have come out here, and the Lord during all these different trials has brought us unto an open field like unto that which father Lehi saw. We are assuming another aspect entirely; we are in another class of society, if you please. It is the nation of the United States who talks with us, and we with them concerning our rights and privileges as citizens. We should not forget this. We should maintain the faith and have it continually in our minds. Our lives should be consistent. It was very pleasant for us when we were here by ourselves, when we were not troubled by drunkenness, or houses of ill fame. Our sisters could then walk out in the evening without the care of their men and feel just as safe as they did in the day time. In these early days it was very pleasant to be so exclusive. But that was not the object of our coming here. As the Savior said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house." Our light should not be hid under the bed or under a bushel, but it ought to be lit up here in these mountains, and it has got to shine so that this whole nation shall see it. And all nations must see and have a chance of accepting or rejecting the Gospel. We must fraternize