

DISCOURSE

BY

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DELIVERED

at the Forty-Fifth Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in the New Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Thursday Afternoon, April 8, 1875.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS

THERE have been a number of items of interest touched upon by the brethren who have spoken during this Conference, and as it is a time when we meet together for the purpose of receiving general instructions, it seems to me very desirable that the time should be occupied in dwelling upon principles which immediately pertain to our condition and present circumstances. In the remarks which I shall make this afternoon I trust I shall be led to speak upon those things which immediately concern us and which pertain to our daily lives.

I rejoice exceedingly in this opportunity, that is, the opportunity of being present at Conference. I believe that I can appreciate it better than I could possibly have done had I been here all the time during the winter. I have, however, during my absence, enjoyed myself better than I could have expected. I have felt that the Lord has been with us as a people, that his power has been manifested in our behalf, and that, so far as the prospects of Zion in the future are concerned, we have abundant reason to be thankful and rejoice. I know that the hope is indulged in in many quarters that the Latter-day Saints are fast losing that faith for which they have been noted, and by the operation of which they have been enabled to accomplish the labors that have devolved upon them in the past in this country as pioneers, and as pioneers in the religious world. I am quite willing, myself, if it is any satisfaction to any individual to entertain this idea that he should do so; but for myself, and I believe I speak the sentiments of the people, I never, in my life, saw greater cause for rejoicing in the cause of God than I do to-day. I am not in the least discouraged, but, on the contrary, I feel exceedingly encouraged. I know, it seems to me, better than I ever knew, that God is with this people, that he hearkens to their prayers, and that he watches over them. It is true that there are influences operating upon us at the present time that we have only recently had to contend with, they are comparatively new influences and, to a certain extent, the Latter-day Saints are unaccustomed to them, especially the rising generation. But it has been taught us from the beginning that Zion is to become a great power in the earth, and that she will triumph; but I cannot conceive how Zion can become that which we have expected, or that it will achieve the destiny predicted concerning it unless it be by passing through ordeals such as those we already have to encounter, and others, still greater, that are yet in the future, by which Zion will show its superiority over every institution and power that exists on the face of the earth.

I have expected for years that the seclusion which we sought in coming to these mountains would be terminated. Everything in the predictions of the holy prophets concerning the work of God in the last days conveyed this idea to my mind. I looked upon our retreat here as a temporary one, for I well knew from the character of the people and their achievements that, in a short time, we should have the world trooping to us; we should be like a city set on a hill, we could not be hid, and that the eyes of men would be attracted Zionward, therefore I have not been disappointed in witnessing that which we see around us to-day. It has come probably in some forms that I had not looked for, because I could only take a general view, the details I did not understand, but that we should pass through ordeals that should test us, test our faith, test our institutions, test the character of our doctrines, test the practical value of everything connected with us, I never had a doubt; and so far as the future is concerned I look forward to an increase rather than a decrease of these things, to an increase of tests, a multiplication of ordeals that will be calculated to test the very nature of our

try us and the system with which we are identified to the perfect satisfaction of every one connected with it. How else could we expect that Zion should become a power in the earth? How else could we expect that that respect should be accorded to Zion which we are led to believe will be the case? How else will the wisdom and power that God will bestow upon his people be made clear in the eyes of this nation and of the nations of the earth only by these practical tests, by these trials, by surmounting these difficulties, and by showing a capacity to meet, grapple with and overcome every emergency and contingency that may arise? Can we achieve that distinction which is inevitably in store for us as a people if the predictions of the prophets be fulfilled short of such an experience as this? I think not. The enemies of this work may indulge in whatever anticipations of our discomfiture or downfall they please, but as for us, let us take a practical, sensible view of the work with which we are identified, and prepare ourselves accordingly, so that when the hour of trial shall come, be it severe or not, we may be prepared therefor, having strength and faith sufficient to endure it, and to bear witness unto all men that we have not cherished this faith in vain.

There is this peculiarity about this work, that no power that has yet arrayed itself against it has succeeded in its attempts to gain advantage over it. It is true there have been seemingly temporary successes; there have been times when mobs and violent men have achieved a temporary success and when they have flattered themselves with the idea that their designs against this work have been successful. But one peculiarity has ever marked the career of this people, that is, that events in our history which have seemed to be deadly blows against us and the work in which we are engaged, have turned out to be magnificent successes for us as a community. Trace our history from the beginning, peruse it carefully, draw the lessons from it which I believe are intended to be conveyed by it, and what do you see? The church and Zion of God emerging from the difficulties, trouble and seeming disaster sought to be brought upon it by its enemies, brighter, stronger, more firmly planted, more united than it was when the difficulty commenced, or the trouble was first visited upon us. The loss of houses and lands, expulsion from homes that were dearly bought, had no such effect upon this people, produced no such thrill and such death-like sorrow in the hearts of the Latter-day Saints as did the martyrdom of our beloved prophet and patriarch; had we lost our dearest friends; had we lost everything that we valued on earth, it seems to me it would not have compared with the poignant sorrow, the deep, heartfelt anguish that prostrated this people in the depths of humility when the news of the cruel murder of their beloved leaders reached them, yet deadly as that blow was, to all human appearance prostrating the entire people, who felt that they had lost those who stood nearest to God and nearest to them, God in his mercy, out of that great affliction brought forth a great triumph, and raised up a man to take the place of the Prophet, who has been in some respects like Elisha following Elijah, possessing, as Elisha desired it might be the case with him, a double portion of the spirit that rested down on his master, Elijah. And God has led us, God has prospered us, and God gave us success that seemed to be commensurate with the depth of our anguish and sorrow, and lifted us up from the depths of humility into which we had sunk, and placed us upon the heights of gladness and joy, and caused us to rejoice as we could not have done probably under other circumstances. And so, when we were driven out of civilization so-called; when we wended our weary way through the wilderness, not knowing where we were going, it seemed as though the last blow had been struck and we had been left a prey to internal dissensions or to the violence of the savages. But God in his mercy, out of that seemingly great affliction, has brought forth great blessing and glory to us, and has honored us, has enriched us, has raised us up and endowed us with blessings that we could not have had where we lived; so that that great blow aimed at us by our enemies has been over-ruled to be the means of great and wonderful blessings to us, and as an entire people we rejoice to-day in the possession of a land, that God has given unto us, to which he led us and which he designated by the finger of inspiration as the land which we should occupy, and which we this day possess despite all the machinations of the wicked and their efforts to strip us of all power herein. Until this day he has given unto us the supremacy in this land, from north to south, from east to west, and he has

made it productive and fertile for our sakes. When we reflect upon our history since we came here; when we think of the many plots and schemes, of the many men who have lent themselves to these plots, who have done all in their power against and to entrap this people; when we reflect upon it all, so far as I am concerned, I am filled with amazement, and with thanksgiving to God our Eternal Father for his goodness and mercy unto us as a people. I know, as well as I know that I live, that no human power could have saved us time and time again as we have been rescued; that there is no wisdom of man that was equal to the emergencies in which we have been placed; but God, in his infinite mercy and wisdom, in his kindness and watchcare over us as a people, has, at the very moment when salvation was needed, stretched forth his Almighty arm. He has rescued us from the grasp of the destroyer when it seemed as though destruction was inevitable and we could not escape. The last five years have been as fruitful, probably, as any period in our history in events of this character. Time and time again has it seemed as though destruction was sure to come upon us, as though there was no way possible for us to escape; but God has heard our supplications and has opened the way of deliverance in a most wonderful manner, and has rescued us from the grasp of those who would destroy us. Others may not see the hand of God in these things; they may say that these things come about from and are the results of natural causes, but those who have prayed to God, whose hearts have been drawn out in supplication to him and who have waited tremblingly for the salvation which he has promised, have seen and they cannot but acknowledge the hand of God in these deliverances, because, as I have said, they have watched, waited and prayed anxiously and earnestly in the name of Jesus for deliverance, and when it has come their faith has been strengthened and their joy increased in the Holy One of Israel; because he has heard and answered their prayers; and to-day the Latter-day Saints are the people of all people upon the face of the earth who know that God lives, because he hears and answers their prayers. And he, it seems, is determined to have a people upon the earth who will be compelled to put their trust in him and not in man, because man's power would utterly fail to save them, and no power but his can do it. When I look at all these things it is a matter of surprise to me that men cannot see the hand of God in this work. Yet there are many whose hearts have been touched by the evidences of God's favor unto us, and they have been surprised and have expressed their wonder that we have been so signally delivered as we have been.

Now there is a great future in store for us as a people. God has said so, and his words cannot fail in being fulfilled. There is a destiny in store for this people that few can comprehend. We have to teach the world lesson after lesson that they have entirely forgotten, or that they never knew. We have to teach them and show them by our example that there is such a thing as living faith, that there is such a thing as trusting in God, being saved by him; that there is such a power as faith in the land, and that prayer, when offered in faith, is effectual in reaching him. We have to show the nations of the earth that God with a small people can accomplish wonderful results. When I think of our numbers, how few we are,—we are a great people in some respects, but in numbers we are few and feeble,—yet with this few people what is God doing in the earth! What a name he is gaining for his people, his servants! You may travel throughout the earth, in every land, among every people, and let it be known that you are a Latter-day Saint, and you will find that the fame of the people has preceded you, and you will find yourselves distinguished from everybody else. It is exceedingly wonderful that a people so small, numerically so insignificant, a people not wealthy, but it may be said poor, are so noted in the earth. Yet this is the fact, and God intends to make us still more so, he intends to give us a name and a place among the nations of the earth that shall be distinguished above all other people. We are accused, you know, of being disloyal. This has been a story told of us, a charge repeated against us from the very beginning, because men have thought it would be most effective in destroying our influence. The idea prevails in many quarters that we are scarcely as true to the government as we should be. I have heard it stated that were it not for these troops at Camp Douglas, Utah Territory would rebel. By such nonsense as this do men who oppose us seek to deceive the world at large respecting us and our motives and feelings. I have had occasion frequently to talk upon this subject. I have told men that, from my early boyhood, I have been taught to believe that the constitution of the United States was revealed of God, and that the destiny in store for the Latter-day Saints was to uphold constitutional government upon this land; and, that being the case, how could it be reconcilable with the idea that we were disloyal to the Government? But there is a class of men who consider everybody disloyal who does not dance to their tunes, and who does not re-echo the sentiments which they express and seem to entertain. We have a class of men among us here who talk about the one-man power and the tyranny that exist in Utah Territory, but at the same time if an official were to come here and associate with citizens of this Territory, "Mormon" citizens I mean, they would put him under a ban and brand him as disloyal and unfit to hold an official position under the Government. And why? For years here it has been considered by certain officials as one of the best recommendations to the favor of those in power to hate and abuse the "Mormon" people of Utah Territory, and if a man

were to dare to associate with "Mormons," or were to speak kindly of or to associate with them, and to treat them as he would other people he would be ostracized and banished, so far as association with them is concerned a non-intercourse act would be passed immediately. And these very individuals talk about the intolerance of the Mormons.

We have these things to contend with, we have these lies to live down, and as far as we are concerned, let them always be lies; let no man have it in his power to say that the Latter-day Saints are an intolerant, proscriptive or an unjust people. Never let this be said of us with truth; but if it be said, let our enemies continue to lie about us until they are tired of it, or until the world become sickened with the falsehoods that are told concerning us. And for us, let us pursue the path that God has marked out, being liberal, truthful, upright, dealing fairly, honestly and tolerantly with every man, so that every class of men who come into our midst may learn that we have received a religion that admits of toleration in the broadest sense of the word.

It has been a matter of considerable satisfaction to me to state that in Utah Territory our pulpits, stands, tabernacles and meetinghouses have always been open to every sect and denomination to come and preach their peculiar views, creeds and doctrines, and that our people have turned out in large congregations to listen to speakers or preachers of other denominations advancing their doctrines; and that not only have congregations of adults been furnished, but the children of the Sunday schools have frequently been assembled in the New Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, that they might purposely hear and become familiar with the ideas and views entertained by other religious denominations. This stands out in marked contrast with the practice of almost every other sect, and it gives the falsehood to the stories which have been so frequently told about us.

Now respecting all these things that we are passing through, I recognize the hand of God in them all. I think that we have learned lessons of late that have been profitable to us. For instance, we now know and, while the recollection of the past few years is vivid in our minds we shall continue to know, how to value a just man who sits as a judge, and it may be that it will be so impressed upon us, that when power shall come into our midst, and come it will, as inevitably as the sun rises in the morning over the eastern hills so sure will power come unto us; but when it does come I trust that the recollection of the past will be vivid in our minds and that we will always seek to deal justly and fairly with all who may seek justice at our hands. It has been said that when we acquire power we shall be intolerant, as other sects have been. The Puritans, who fled from England because of religious persecution became, in turn, themselves the persecutors when they had the power. Roger Williams fled from them and took refuge in what is now Rhode Island. They persecuted the Quakers and others who came within their borders with an intolerance that was equal to, if it did not exceed, the intolerance to which they themselves had been the victims. And it has been said concerning us, that if we had the power, we would probably tread in the same path, that persecution would only harden us and make us deal with others with a severity which we would not know anything about had we ourselves not been victims beforehand. But I think that God in his mercy will strip us if there be any vestige of this about us; I hope he will, at any rate. If we achieve the destiny that is in store for us, certainly to maintain that character and to retain that power, it will be necessary that we should be just, upright, forbearing and tolerant, and that we should be willing that every man in this broad land should worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, whether his god be the workmanship of his own hands, whether it be the sun, the moon, some animal, or the God of heaven, with Jesus his Son, that we shall be willing that every man should worship God according to his own feelings upon the subject, so long as he does not interfere with us, or with others. I think we have learned this lesson in part. I think the lessons that have been impressed upon us have had an effect in this direction, at least they have had the effect to broaden us; and every lesson of this kind will have such a result as this with us as a people, and on this account I am thankful for them.

I am thankful to-day that we are not a State. There have been times when I have wished exceedingly that we might be released from territorial vassalage and be incorporated in the Union as a sovereign state. I have desired, and labored for it; but this last winter I have been exceedingly thankful that Utah was a territory and not a state. We are told to acknowledge the hand of God in all things, and I do not see why we should not acknowledge it in being kept in this condition of tutelage and vassalage as well as in anything else. But it may be asked—"Why do you think our condition better as a territory than as a state?" When I heard of events in Louisiana, the federal troops maintaining a government there, against which I was informed, and as I believed, the mass of the people revolted, I thought to myself—Better be an insignificant territory than a state if we can not have the right of choosing our own rulers and have them act in the offices to which they are elected. Thanks to our insignificant federal troops have not interfered with us here; but if we had been a State, with two votes in the Senate, a vote or two in the House, and electoral votes in the Presidential Election they might have been a temptation to have done with Utah as with other states. But we had no vote; our delegate in Congress had no vote; we had no senatorial representation; we had no vote at the Presidential Election, and this denial to us

of our rights, by keeping us in a Territorial condition, has thus far helped to save us. With such a feeling as there has been in this city and territory, for contesting elections, when they have been overwhelmingly on one side—twenty thousand and upward against two or three thousand; when men will contest elections under such circumstances, and endeavor by unjust means to wrest the power out of the hands of the people and defeat the will of the majority; when they will do this, as has been done in this Territory, it would not need a very strong pretext to have them go farther, to have them appeal for Federal interference, and to try and induce the government to say—"Those whom you call the minority are the majority, they have been unjustly dealt with; affidavits have come here showing that the polls have not been managed properly, the ballots have not been deposited as they should be, and we must decide against you "Mormons" and the men whom you have elected, and put your opponents into power." I do not say that this is the case in Louisiana, I do not pretend to decide upon that question, it admits of a good deal of argument; but I have been told by members of Congress who visited there—the committee sent by Congress to investigate matters, that if the federal troops had been withdrawn from Louisiana this winter twenty-four hours would not have elapsed until the McEnery government would have been put in power, and the whole difficulty would have been solved. But the presence of federal troops maintained a government that could not be maintained in aid of itself. What is the use, then, of being a State government if the Federal government is to interfere in this manner in State affairs? And with the causes that exist in Utah Territory to make interference popular and a thing to be approved of by thousands, a State government would not be so desirable. I have, therefore, so far as my own feelings have been concerned, been very much pleased at being a territory. I have seen the hand of God and his wisdom in this thing, when if my wish or my will could have been gratified we should have been a State long ago.

The Lord, in his mercy, will preserve us from these evils; in his overruling wisdom and providence he will deliver us until the time shall come for us to be a state if that be his will, and I doubt not that we shall become a state so easily that we shall be surprised at it ourselves. I have come to the conclusion, as one individual, that I shall not be anxious on this subject in the future, and shall leave it to the overruling providence of God to bring about when it shall seem good unto him.

As to some of the States in the South they are in such a condition that we, if we were in the same, should think our lot dreadful. I have heard stories of usurpation and tyranny by officials in those states that have caused me to think that, notwithstanding all that we have had to endure in Utah Territory, our lot has been a fortunate one compared with that of others. They have drunk the cup of humiliation to its very dregs. You know there was a time here when it seemed as though every effort was made to bring us under military rule in this Territory; and when the provocations endured by the people here come to be read in history surprise will arise in the mind of the reader, and admiration for the people who so patiently endured the wrongs that were imposed upon them, especially when it is remembered what power we hold here. Why, think of it, a few years ago a Governor came to this Territory immediately after a long and bloody Indian war, in which our citizens were massacred, their property stolen, their settlements robbed and their stock driven off; and immediately after that war a Governor came here who prohibited the militia, every able-bodied man in the Territory, from bearing arms—a most unheard of tyrannical exercise of power; and then a Secretary, while acting governor, afterwards repeated the same proclamation. And this people have borne it patiently and never lifted their hands against these contemptible tyrants. It was doubtless hoped that we would commit some overt act to provoke trouble, so that the federal troops could be brought in and be placed under the control of these officials, who for once in their lives happened to hold position. Not only this, but on one occasion when certain citizens met together as a company, to celebrate the fact of their band having got a new set of instruments a federal judge committed them to a military prison for violating this proclamation, as though a proclamation of the Governor was law! With as great propriety might an Executive claim that he has the power to restore the curfew, and say—"You must have your fires extinguished by eight o'clock at night, or we will put you in a military prison; and you must rise in the morning at the tap of the bell, or we will treat you as criminals." If a Governor's proclamation is law, and is to be respected as such, where will it end? Will it end with the imprisonment of men who act as militia men? No; if such acts of usurpation continue, no citizen will be safe, and they will end in the overthrow of liberty and constitutional right wherever permitted.

We have borne these things, and we have borne others, the recollection of which were I to recite them to you, would make our blood boil. It is not necessary that I should do so; but in talking thus do we talk disloyally? American citizens have the right to talk about officials who trample upon their rights in this manner; we all have the right to question the acts of men in power; it is a right given to us, and the man is not worthy the name of freeman who will not thus criticize acts of oppression, and, in a proper manner, present them and show his abhorrence of them. It is because they are violative of the fundamental principles of our government that I thus talk about them; and in any other Territory than this they would have provoked a storm.