

DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER WILFORD WOODRUFF,

DELIVERED

June 27th, 1875, in the Second Ward School-house, S. L. City, at the funeral services of John Houseman, aged six years, and Willie Franklin, aged four years, sons of William and Ann Wheeler, burned to death at Wanship, Summit County, U. T., June 24th, 1875.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

I AM entirely dependent this morning upon the Spirit of the Lord to guide and direct me in what I may say upon this painful occasion. Those who have assembled here—Brother and Sister Wheeler, and their friends who mourn with them, are dependent upon the same source for comfort in their serious bereavement; and in fact we are all dependent upon the blessing and Spirit of the Lord in all the labors of life, and I hope that, in our services this morning, a large measure of that Spirit will be imparted unto us.

I feel disposed to read the first chapter of Job as a preliminary to any remarks I may make. [The speaker read the first chapter of the Book of Job.] We also see in reading the history of Job that the devil did not finish with him there, as it seems the devil had another conversation with the Lord on this subject, in which he informed the Lord that a man would give anything for his life, and that if he, the devil, touched Job's flesh he would certainly curse God. And it seems from reading this history that the Lord put Job into the hands of the devil to do as he pleased with him, only to spare his life. Of course the history is familiar to you all who have read the Bible, and you are aware that the devil smote Job, and he was covered with boils from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, so that he was in great distress, trouble and tribulation, yet in the midst of it all he did not sin, but acknowledged the hand of the Lord.

I may say with regard to the case which has brought us together this morning, it is a little similar to that of Job. We meet with some strange things in the history of our lives in the dispensations and dealings of God with men. In the case before us we are called to mourn the loss of two children taken from Brother and Sister Wheeler, we may say as suddenly and in one sense of the word, as miraculously, as were the sons and daughters of Job. His affliction consisted not only in the loss of two children, but of all his children and also of all the possessions that he had, yet still, under all this he said—"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

I know very well it is hard for any person to be called to pass through the scenes that we sometime are called to pass through in this life, it is so in the case before us this morning. The loss of these little children, taken away as they were, is certainly painful, not only to the parents, but to every person who reflects; and it is a very hard matter for any of us to enter into and appreciate the depth of sorrow which parents feel on occasions like this, it is difficult to bring the matter home to our own hearts unless we have been called to pass through similar affliction and sorrow. At the same time there is no doubt that we all sympathize with our friends when called to pass through trials and bereavement. And I will here say to Brother and Sister Wheeler, and to all my friends, there are a great many worse things in this world than the case we are now called to mourn.

Our children are taken away from us in infancy and childhood, and they are taken away as Job's were, in one sense of the word, through the dispensations of Providence, causing us severe trials. This we will acknowledge; but, as I have already said, there are many things in this world that are far more painful and afflicting than to have our children burned to death. My friends may ask—"What is Brother Woodruff driving at in this remark?" I will tell you. I have lived in these valleys twenty-seven years, since the pioneers came here. I have seen a whole generation of men and women

grow up in these valleys of the mountains, and they have become parents. I have seen some, I will not say a great many, but I have seen some young men, I say nothing about maidens, who have met with untimely deaths and who have gone to the grave disgraced, and a dishonor to themselves and to their parents. Circumstances of this kind are far more painful to any parent in the world than it is for their children to meet with sudden death by accident or any other way. I do not make these remarks to apply to Brother and Sister Wheeler, for none of us know what course our children will take. We set good examples before them, and we strive to teach them righteous principles, but when they come to years of accountability they have their agency and they act for themselves.

Many things are transpiring in the earth to-day which we should regard as great calamities and as grievous to be borne if we had to pass through them. Think of these late earthquakes in South America, eight thousand people out of ten thousand in one city sunk in the earth in a few moments. And then, the tremendous floods that are sweeping over France and other parts of the earth, causing the death of hundreds and thousands of men, women and children. All these things are in fulfillment of the revelations of God, and of the judgments which he has promised should come upon the earth in the last days. One of the purposes which the Lord has in view in gathering his Saints to the valleys of the mountains is that they may not share in the sins or partake of the plagues of Babylon; therefore we have reason to rejoice before the Lord because of his mercies and blessings unto us. And with regard to a case like this before us this morning—the loss of these children—I want to say a few words for the consolation of those who are sorrowing. In the first place these children are innocent before the Lord; as to their death and the cause thereof, that is in the hands of God, and we should not complain of the Lord or his dispensations any more than Job did. These children have been taken away very suddenly, and in such a manner as to cause great sorrow and distress to their parents, but there is this consolation connected with the matter—they are innocent, they are not in transgression. They have paid the law of death which God passed on Adam and all his posterity; but when their spirits left their bodies and got into the spirit world their trouble and affliction were over. Their death was a very painful one, but their suffering is now over, and in a few years from now they will come forth out of their graves in the morning of the resurrection, not marred by fire or any element, but clothed with glory, immortality and eternal life, in eternal beauty and bloom, and they will be given into the hands of their parents, and they will receive them in the family organization of the celestial world, and their parents will have them for ever. They will live as long as their God lives. This, to Latter-day Saints, who believe in the resurrection, should be a source of comfort and consolation.

Why our children are taken from us it is not for me to say, for God never revealed it unto me. We are all burying them. I have buried one-third of the children that have been given unto me. I have had some thirty children born to me, and ten of them are buried, all of them young. The question may arise with me and with you—"Why has the Lord taken away my children?" But that is not for me to tell, because I do not know; it is in the hands of the Lord, and it has been so from the creation of the world all the way down. Children are taken away in their infancy, and they go to the spirit world. They come here and fulfil the object of their coming, that is, they tabernacle in the flesh. They come to receive a probation and an inheritance on the earth; they obtain a body or tabernacle, and that tabernacle will be preserved for them, and in the morning of the resurrection the spirits and bodies will be reunited, and as here we find children of various ages in a family, from the infant at the mother's breast to manhood, so will it be in the family organization in the celestial world. Our children will be restored to us as they are laid down if we, their parents, keep the faith and prove ourselves worthy to obtain eternal

life; and if we do not so prove ourselves our children will still be preserved, and will inherit celestial glory. This is my view in regard to all infants who die, whether they are born to Jew or Gentile, righteous or wicked. They come from their eternal father and their eternal mother unto whom they were born in the eternal world, and they will be restored to their eternal parentage; and all parents who have received children here according to the order of God and the holy priesthood, no matter in what age they may have lived, will claim those children in the morning of the resurrection, and they will be given unto them and they will grace their family organizations in the celestial world.

With regard to the future state of those who die in infancy I do not feel authorized to say much. There has been a great deal of theory, and many views have been expressed on this subject, but there are many things connected with it which the Lord has probably never revealed to any of the prophets or patriarchs who ever appeared on the earth. There are some things which have not been revealed to man, but are held in the bosom of God our Father, and it may be that the condition after death of those who die in infancy is among the things which God has never revealed; but it is sufficient for me to know that our children are saved, and that if we ourselves keep the faith and do our duty before the Lord, if we keep the celestial law, we shall be preserved by that law, and our children will be given unto us there, as they have been given here in this world of sorrow, affliction, pain and distress. It has no doubt been a marvel many times, in the minds of men and women, why God ever placed men and women in such a world as this, why he causes his children to pass through sorrow and affliction here in the body. The Lord has revealed something to us concerning this matter, and we have learned enough about it to know that this thing is necessary. We know that we are created in the image of God, both male and female; and whoever goes back into the presence of God our eternal Father, will find that he is a noble man, a noble God, tabernacled in a form similar to ours, for we are created after his own image; they will also learn that he has placed us here that we may pass through a state of probation and experience, the same as he himself did in his day of mortality. And time and again it has been revealed in the revelations of God given in our day, as well as in the Bible and Book of Mormon, that these things are necessary in order to enable us to comprehend good and evil, and to be prepared for glory and blessings when we receive them. As the Apostle argues very strongly in the Book of Mormon—"If we never taste the bitter how will we know how to comprehend the sweet? If we never partake of pain how can we prize ease? And if we never pass through affliction how can we comprehend glory, exaltation and eternal blessings?"

The Lord has said concerning Jesus that he descended below all things that he might rise above all things and comprehend all things. No man descended lower than the Savior of the world. Born in a stable, cradled in a manger, he travelled from there to the cross through suffering mingled with blood to a throne of grace; and in all his life there was nothing of an earthly nature that seemed to be worth possessing. His whole life was passed in poverty, suffering, pain, affliction, labor, prayer, mourning and sorrow until he gave up the ghost on the cross. Still he was God's firstborn son and the Redeemer of the world. The question might be asked why the Lord suffered his son to come here and to live and die as he did. When we get into the spirit world, and the veil is withdrawn we shall then perhaps understand the whys and wherefores of all these things. In the dispensations and providences of God to man it seems that we are born to suffer pain, affliction, sorrows and trials; this is what God has decreed that the human family shall pass through; and if we make a right use of this probation, the experience it brings will eventually prove a great blessing to us, and when we receive immortality and eternal life, exaltation, kingdoms, thrones, principalities and powers with all the blessings of the fullness of the gospel of Christ, we shall understand and comprehend why we were called to pass through a continual warfare during the few years we spent in the flesh.

It certainly does require a good deal of the Spirit of the Lord to give comfort and consolation to a father and mother mourning for the loss of their children; and without the gospel of Christ the separation by death is one of the most gloomy subjects it is possible to contemplate; but just as soon as we obtain the gospel and learn the principle of the resurrection the gloom, sorrow and suffering occasioned by death are, in a great measure, taken away. I have often thought that, to see a dead body, and to see that body laid in the grave and covered with earth, is one of the most gloomy things on earth; without the gospel it is like taking a leap in the dark. But as quick as we obtain the gospel, as soon as the spirit of man is enlightened by the inspiration of the Almighty, he can exclaim with one of old—"Oh grave, where is thy victory, Oh death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the gift of God is eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ." The resurrection of the dead presents itself before the enlightened mind of man, and he has a foundation for his spirit to rest upon. That is the position of the Latter-day Saints to-day. We do know for ourselves, we are not in the dark with regard to this matter; God has revealed it

to us and we do understand the principle of the resurrection of the dead, and that the gospel brings life and immortality to light. We have received the gospel, and if we are true to the principles of that gospel as long as we live we shall be made partakers of immortality, exaltation and glory.

I know very well that the loss of their children in this terrible manner is a sad affliction to Brother and Sister Wheeler; it was a sad affliction for Job when his children and possessions were taken from him in an hour, but yet he had sense or knowledge enough to understand and say that when he came into the world he possessed neither children, houses, lands, horses, oxen, camels nor asses, but that all his wealth had been given to him by the Lord, and that the Lord had taken them away and blessed be his holy name. I will say to our mourning friends, your children are taken away and you can not help it, we cannot any of us help it; there is no censure to be given to parents when they do the best they can. A mother should not be censured because she can not save her sick child, and we have to leave these things in the hand of God. It will be but a little time until they will be restored to us; in a little time Brother and Sister Wheeler will again have the children whose loss they now mourn.

With regard to the growth, glory or exaltation of children in the life to come God has not revealed anything on that subject to me, either about your children, mine or anybody else's, any further than we know they are saved. And I feel that we have to put our trust in the Lord in these afflictions, we have to lean upon his arm and to look to him for comfort and consolation. We do not mourn under these afflictions as those who have no hope; we do not mourn the loss of our children as though we were never going to see them again, because we know better. The Lord has taught us better, and so has the gospel; the revelations of Jesus Christ have shown us that they will be restored to us in the resurrection of the just. And I will here say with regard to the gospel of Christ that it is one of the greatest mysteries under the heavens to me why there are so few of the human family, whether in the Christian, Pagan or Jewish world, who take any interest in eternal things, in the state of man after death. If we read the Bible we learn that Noah, filled with revelation and with the gospel in his hand, although he labored a hundred and twenty years, could not get a solitary soul except his own family to go with him for salvation. It was similar in the days of the patriarchs and prophets, and if we come down to the days of Christ, we find that his testimony was rejected by the rabbies, high priests and the great mass of the people, and he chose for his apostles twelve poor fishermen, and they and very few of the people, comparatively speaking, were all that received the teachings of Jesus and followed him through the regeneration; while the whole Jewish nation, with these few exceptions, were ready to put their Shiloh to death, and he was the person upon whom the salvation of the whole house of Israel depended. It is just so to-day. The great majority of the people reject the words of life and salvation which are proclaimed unto them. God, in these last days, revealed the gospel of Jesus Christ to Joseph Smith by the teachings of angels out of heaven, and its principles are made known to the world, and there has never been a congregation of Gentiles, from that day to this, to whom the elders of Israel have borne record of these things, but what the Spirit of God has also borne record of the truth of their testimony; and herein lies the condemnation of this generation, for "light has come into the world, but men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." I ask, in the name of God and humanity, why is it that intelligent beings, made in the image of God, take no interest in their condition after death? They know they are going to die, and if they have any sense or reflection, they know they will live after the death of their mortal bodies; still men will sell their eternal interest for money, for a few hundred or a few thousand dollars they will sell all the interest they have in the eternal world; in fact they take no interest in their eternal welfare. Their cry is—"Give me gold, silver and honors the few years I spend here and eternal life may go where it pleases, I have no interest in that." I ask again, why is it that the human family take no interest in these things? We have preached over forty years. I have been engaged in that work over that time, and have proclaimed the word of eternal life to millions of people and have travelled more than a hundred thousand miles in so doing, and, as the prophet has said, I have found one of a family and two of a city who have had eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand, and they have been gathered up from the various nations of the earth into the mountains of Israel, and here to-day we have a little handful of people, out of the twelve hundred millions who dwell upon the earth, who feel an interest in building up the Zion and Kingdom of God upon the earth, and who are desirous of being saved in that kingdom.

Now I would rather be poor all the days of my life, I would rather go through poverty and affliction it matters not how severe, even to the sacrifice of my own life, than lose salvation and eternal life, because I have faith in it, and always had. I always have had faith in the Bible and in the revelations of God since I was a boy like these sitting on these seats, eight or ten years old, when I went to the Presbyterian Sunday school and read about Jesus Christ. I believed then that he was the Savior of the world; I believed that the Old and New Testament was true. I believe it to-day. What would it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What will a man give in exchange for his soul? When he comes into the presence of God he can't buy it. This is

the position of the world. There is none of us going to live but a little while; we shall all pass away soon, and our eternal destiny depends upon the few days, weeks, months or years that we spend here in the flesh. Do you not think it will pay a man or a woman to keep the commandments of God? It will, and when we enjoy the holy Spirit, when we are trying to live our religion here on the earth, we are the happiest people on God's footstool, no matter what our circumstances may be. I do not care whether we are rich or poor, whether in happiness or affliction, if a man is living his religion and enjoys the favor and Spirit of God, it makes no difference to him what takes place on the earth. There may be earthquakes, war, fire or sword in the land, but he feels that it is all right with him. That is the way I feel to-day.

With regard to the gospel of Christ, it is a thing that we should all labor to maintain the few years that we spend here. When I get through with this life and go into the spirit world I do not want to miss what I have in anticipation. I have always desired to see the Saviour, Father Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and those old prophets we read about in the Bible. I desired this before I heard this gospel, I desire it to-day; and I do not wish to miss this, for nothing in this world would pay me for such a sacrifice. But I know that it requires constant warfare, labor and faithfulness before the Lord in order for us to keep in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and to live in such a manner that we may obtain these blessings. Jesus says—"Strait is the gate and narrow the way that leads to eternal lives, and few there are who find it, while broad is the way that leads to death, and many there be who go in thereat." The road to death is broad enough to catch the whole world, and they do not like to walk in the strait and narrow one, they do not like to keep the celestial law. I have met with professed ministers of the gospel, in my travels, at whose tables I have eaten and drunk, and I have given them the Book of Mormon and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and have talked to and labored with them, and I have known some of them spend days and days in this warfare, trying to decide which to do, whether to receive the gospel of Christ and take the reproach of the world, or reject it; and I may say that in nine cases out of ten they have come to the conclusion to reject it. When I visited Fox Island the first time, I went to the house of Mr. Newton, a Baptist minister; and I stayed with him. But first I went to his church and heard him preach, and when he got through I wanted to hear record of the gospel, for I had a message to that people, and I appointed a meeting for four o'clock in the afternoon, and I preached the gospel to them, and Mr. Newton took me to his home and I gave him the Book of Mormon and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and for ten days that man walked about his room until midnight trying to decide what he should do. The Spirit of the Lord bore record to him that if he obeyed the gospel which I had proclaimed unto him he would lose his good name and honor among men, but that if he did not receive it, he would be damned. Finally he rejected it, and the consequence was that he became a vagabond, and a miserable outcast. I baptized all his flock who owned any portion of the meetinghouse, and if he had embraced the gospel and been gathered with them he would have been here and saved in the kingdom of God, instead of the vagabond that he has since become. I merely mention this to show how the minds of some men are acted upon by the tidings of the gospel. Some of them feel that it would be a great reproach to obey that gospel and to keep the commandments of God. Bless your souls, we who obey the gospel of Christ are all in good company. Whenever you are persecuted for righteousness sake, said Jesus, rejoice and be exceeding glad for so persecuted they the prophets and apostles which were before you.

I will say to all, whether in the church or in the world, it will pay you to keep the commandments of God. Here is a man who has a wife that he thinks a great deal of; they have lovely children, and the ties of affection bind them closely. Now should not such a man have respect enough for God to keep his commandments and so secure to himself his wife and his children in the celestial world after the resurrection? But you cannot get worldlings to believe in such a principle; the people, as I said before, have not interest enough in the things of the kingdom of God to be willing to keep the commandments of God.

I say to the Latter-day Saints, we should be faithful to our God. We are blessed above all the people that breathe the breath of life upon the earth, and we are blessed above all other dispensations and generations of men, for the Lord has put into our hands the power to build up his Zion upon the earth, never more to be thrown down, and this is what no other generation has ever been called to do. But although this is the mission of the Latter-day Saints, we have a continual warfare to wage—a warfare with the powers of darkness, and a warfare with ourselves. The ancients had a similar experience to pass through—they had their day of trials, troubles and tribulations. Enoch labored three hundred and sixty-five years in building up Zion, and he had the opposition of the whole world. But the Lord blessed him so that he maintained his ground for that length of time, and gathered together a few out of the nations of the earth, and they were sanctified before the Lord, and he had to take them away, and the saying went forth—"Zion is fled." So you may trace down all the prophets. Read the history of Enoch, Jeremiah, Isaiah and others, and you will find that it was a warfare with them all the way through. And so with Jesus and the Apostles. But all those dispensations have passed and gone into the spirit.