

DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER WILFORD WOODRUFF,

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REPORTED BY GEO. F. GIBBS.

I LISTENED with a great deal of interest this forenoon to the remarks made by Brother Smith. We, all of us, have our views and reflections and meditations with regard to our condition, and I presume that we all see and understand alike; at least we should do so. With regard to the work of God, which has been established in our day and generation, I have never had any fears myself respecting it. I have never had any fears in my own mind with regard to the Zion of God, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or the fulfillment of revelation and prophecy relating to this last dispensation of the fulness of times. And the reason I have had no fears concerning this the last dispensation of the fulness of times is, that I think that God understands perfectly well when He has given His word to inspired men—prophets and apostles—who have spoken as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, no matter whether it has been in this dispensation or any other—that He said what He meant, and meant precisely what He said. And the Lord calculates to fulfil all the promises He has ever made to the inhabitants of the earth.

When I read the Bible, and the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants, I read those records believing them to contain eternal truths; and although the heavens and the earth pass away, there is not one jot or tittle of His word will fail in its fulfillment. These are my feelings; this is my faith in regard to the truths contained in those records. I do not believe that God ever set His hand to establish a dispensation and a kingdom and work like this that has been established in our day, without fully understanding that He had power to carry out His purposes; but when we come to calculate on ourselves as individuals, that is entirely another thing. God can build up His kingdom with a few men and women, or with many men and women. But I believe when God prepared the way for calling Joseph Smith to establish this Church and kingdom in the fulness of times, this great last dispensation given unto man, that our Heavenly Father perfectly understood that He had the element to work with, such material that He could depend upon in the accomplishment of the purposes designed.

Our position is, however, as Bro. Joseph F. has described it. Our prosperity and progress, as a Church, depend in a great measure upon our conduct; it depends on ourselves at least for our own salvation and exaltation; and as a people, it certainly depends upon us. I am satisfied in my own mind from what preaching I have done in my life, from reading the history of the world, the history of Christ and of His Church and people, and of the different dispensations, I am satisfied that there were very few men or very few women in this or any other generation that have had independence of mind enough, and have had faith enough in God to attempt to keep the law of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are a great many presentations concerning those of Christ and the Apostles. Paul referred to it. In speaking of the Gospel he says: "But if Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is in the image of God, should shine unto them." There were very few men in this generation or any other, as far as I have been acquainted, that have been willing to make sacrifice. Who have been willing to receive the Gospel of Christ on the conditions of it? Who have been willing to suffer persecution and make sacrifices as the celestial law of God requires of men in order to receive that Gospel and live it and to carry it out? But few indeed. The world are blinded; they are so far from the Lord that they are blinded with regard to the blessings, with regard to the gifts, with regard to the reward that the Gospel of Jesus Christ guarantees to the children of men in their obedience to it. Jesus presented this subject very plainly to Nicodemus when He went to him and said, "Rab-

bi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him; what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus it appears did not understand the Savior, and he therefore asked Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Jesus then said unto him: "Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." A man has got to be born of the spirit of God before he can see the kingdom of God. The world being destitute of this heavenly light they cannot "see" the kingdom of God; the world cannot comprehend it—I was going to say not far more than if the sound of it had never reached their ears. Why? Because they will not receive the testimony of it; because they have rejected the light; because they love darkness better than light, because their deeds are evil; because the gods of this world—the gold and silver and the wealth that perisheth—are uppermost with them, instead of the love of the truth. This is what makes such a vast difference between the Saints of God and the world, not only in this but in every other dispensation. The world did not see the kingdom of God in the day of Jesus; the world did not see it to-day. The gospel is hid from them; its beauty, its power and its glory, and the gifts and blessings which the gospel of Jesus Christ imparts to the children of men are entirely hid from them. Let a man open his heart to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit, and to the testimony of the Elders of this Church who proclaim the principles of the gospel of Christ; and let him be honest before God and seek to Him in fervent prayer, and the Holy Spirit will enlighten his mind, and he will be born of the Spirit so that he will see, in a measure, this kingdom; but no man can enter into it unless he is born of the water and of the Spirit. I have always believed, and I do to-day, that there has not been an Elder of this Church, from the day that Joseph Smith opened his mouth, after receiving the authority of the Aaronic Priesthood, to proclaim the gospel of Jesus as it had been made known unto him through the ministrations of heavenly beings, I do not think that there has been a single Elder of this Church who has gone forth to bear testimony to the truth of this gospel and has done so in the spirit of his calling as a servant of the living God, but what the power of God has borne record of that testimony. The thousands and tens of thousands of Latter-day Saints who have heard the voice of the Elders proclaiming the glad tidings of great joy in lands beyond the sea, or wherever they chanced to hear them, have experienced the operations of the Spirit of God bearing record unto them of the truthfulness of their message. And there have been thousands and doubtless tens of thousands who on hearing the word preached have experienced the same operations of the Spirit of God; but could they obey its admonitions by rendering obedience to the requirements of the gospel? Were they prepared to sacrifice the honors of this world, or brave enough to renounce the creeds of their fathers, to accept the conditions upon which men receive the gospel of Christ, namely, to make sacrifice, to suffer persecution, to be hated of the world, and to be misrepresented and abused? No, they have felt that they could not do it, and hence they have rejected the light of truth, and must therefore abide the consequences. I heard a minister say on one occasion that he would not believe the doctrine of the Latter-day Saints, even if an angel of God were to come from heaven and declare that it was true. And this is really the feeling of tens of thousands of the present generation.

The gospel has gone forth to the world in its simplicity and purity and power, free from the interpellations and ambiguity of man-made systems. And when men have heard the truth spoken in the spirit thereof, and they reject the light that accompanies it, and that bears record of its divinity, the Spirit of God, which all men are more or less possessed of, after a suitable time, withdraws from them; and in time that light which they once enjoyed becomes darkness, or rather, darkness takes its place. Hence, God has said: I am angry with the wicked;

I will withdraw my Spirit from the inhabitants of the earth because they have rejected the testimony of the gospel of Christ and shed the blood of the Prophets. The hatred of this world—of Priests and priest-ridden people, is kindled against us, not because we have injured any of them or anybody else, but simply because light has come into the world, and God has chosen us as humble instruments in His hands to disseminate that light to a wicked and fallen world, and they hate us because they love darkness rather than the light, and that, too, because their deeds are evil.

God has commenced His great latter-day work; He has commenced to gather together His own that He might have dominion over them, and He has already done what Jeremiah the Prophet predicted that He would do, He has taken one of a city and two of a family and gathered them to Zion. And why have we been gathered? Because when we heard the testimony of the servants of God saluting our ears with the glad tidings of the gospel, we did not close our ears nor seal our hearts against it, but you listened to it, and the spirit of God bore record to you that what the Elders told you was true; which if you would obey by repenting of your sins and being baptized for the remission of them, they promised you that you should receive the Holy Ghost through the laying on of hands. You obeyed; you received the heavenly gift, and that testimony and spirit and the power thereof has led you to these mountains, and has sustained you under the varied vicissitudes and trying scenes through which you have had to pass.

Now, whatever law a people keep, they are preserved by that law, and they receive the benefit of whatever blessings belong to it. If a man abide the celestial law, that man will inherit celestial glory. If a man abide a terrestrial law, he will inherit a terrestrial glory. And he that cannot keep within the celestial nor the terrestrial law, he must abide a terrestrial glory, which as has been revealed through Joseph Smith, that he who will not abide either of these laws must abide a kingdom which is not a kingdom of glory. We certainly should be encouraged, as a people, who have received the fulness of the gospel, inheriting as we do the glorious promises of faithfulness and integrity to the same, and we have reason to be encouraged at the prosperity of the kingdom of God, and at the foothold it has made in the earth; and we should seek as men and women, young and old, to live according to the light of truth which we have received. I in my meditations look upon the world like this, that when the gospel comes to a generation, and that generation reject it, whether as a nation, or a household, or an individual, the spirit, and power, and light of that gospel is withdrawn from them and they are left in spiritual darkness.

When this gospel was first revealed from heaven there was a great deal of the Spirit of God among the sectarian world; to a great extent in those days men acted up to the best light they had, I refer to such men as Wesley, Melancthon, Calvin, Luther and many others, as well as their ardent followers; I consider that the leading men of those days were moved upon to do the work they did. But then, they did not establish the Church of Christ; this they could not do for God had not revealed to them His gospel nor called them to perform such a work; they, however, assisted in preparing the way for its restoration among men by doing all they could to break the chains of superstition by which the people generally were bound. And after doing their work which they did without hearing the gospel, and acting up to the best light they had, hence they were under no condemnation. And so with the whole sectarian world for generations past. As I have often said, and I believe to-day there are many generations, say 1,700 or 1,800 years ago, from the days that the ancient apostles were put to death—as Bro. Joseph said to-day with regard to the persecution, these apostles were all put to death excepting John the Revelator; whom they could not destroy; the Lord preserved him for a wise purpose in Himself. But when these men were put to death the Priesthood was taken from their midst; taken home to God who gave it. The Roman Church held sway for about 1,000 years, having the power to set up kings or to put down thrones, and to a great measure it governed the world, until the days of Martin Luther. But did that ecclesiastical

body have the Priesthood? No; it had been taken from among men rejected and those were slain who were sent unto them. Neither have the daughters—the offspring of the old Mother Church, the three hundred and six score sects that have grown out of her, they have not the priesthood, it not being in the power of the Mother Church to bestow it, for they never owned, it God never gave it to them. They never saw the face of a prophet or a man delegated with power from heaven to confer the ordinances of the house of God, not but what many of them enjoyed a good deal of the Spirit of God. Millions of such people have passed away, they are in the spirit world, or their prison house; and the Prophet Joseph Smith and ten thousand of the Elders of Israel who have died full in the faith of the gospel are there to preach to them, and this is their work. And such men as John Wesley and others—honest men, also honest women who acted up to the best light they had, will receive their testimony; and when we build and dedicate these Temples, we will administer for them in the ordinances of the gospel which are essential to a man's salvation whether living or dead; and there they will be prepared to come forth in the morning of the first resurrection.

You have the gospel. I have the gospel. We have the Holy Ghost; we have the inspiration of Almighty God, and our eyes are open, and we can comprehend in our limited capacity some of the things of God. And what man enjoying the light of this spirit could sell his priesthood—his birthright and the blessings which have been sealed upon his head by authority of the holy priesthood, for gold or silver or for the honors or fleeting pleasures of this world? No Elder in Israel, whose mind is open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and who comprehends things as they are, and who understands the nature of his calling, and has but a faint idea of the relationship that he sustains to God and holy angels by virtue of that calling, could for a moment entertain such a question, he could neither be bought nor sold. But, as has been said, when we turn away from righteousness and truth, and get into the dark; when we do not pray, and our hearts become set upon the things of this world, and we seek after the honors of men, we then lose the Spirit of God and become mixed in our mind with regard to our duties as Latter-day Saints; and finally it becomes more congenial with our feelings and dispositions to serve mammon than to serve God. The light which once illuminated our understandings has now left us, and darkness has taken the place thereof; the god of this world has overcome us, and so, we find ourselves under his grasp and dominion, and sad indeed is our condition. We should, my brethren and also my sisters, read and study the revelations of God, and labor to overcome the infirmities of the flesh, and to sanctify ourselves and thus prepare our minds for the things of the kingdom of God.

I look upon the world, the Christian world, so-called, both priest and people, as being a great way from the Lord; and that being the case they hardly know what they are doing when they persecute the Latter-day Saints, when they exert themselves to overthrow this Church and Kingdom. They are influenced by the same unseen power that the persecutors of the people of God have been in all the dispensations of the world. I believe this generation to be as wicked as any generation that ever lived, taking the people as a whole. By and by all will pass away; then he whom they have served, even their master, the refuge of lies, will claim them as his own, and he will rule over them, while God will claim and rule over His Saints. This line will sooner or later be drawn between us.

I will say to you, my brethren and sisters, we are all too far from God; and I believe I can endorse the testimony of Brother Joseph this forenoon—our prosperity and our condition in these mountains will depend upon our conduct. If we will seek to know the mind and will of God concerning us and then do it and live according to it, and draw near unto Him, we will certainly get His Holy Spirit to enable us to perform our duty, and we will have power to remain in Zion, and Zion will not be removed out of her place; and we will have power to build temples and finish and dedicate them to God; and in those temples we will

have the power to administer for the dead and seal blessings upon the living. This is a great and glorious privilege; it is something that the Christian world knows nothing about, neither can they so long as they reject those that are sent to them to call them to repentance. I think we should, as Apostles, as High Priests, as Seventies, as Elders, as men and women who have entered into covenant with God, labor to pursue that course, that we may finish our mission with joy, that we may finish our testimony upon the earth and be satisfied with it when we get to the other side of the veil. And I know that it we have the spirit of the Lord, as it is our privilege to have, that we will have power to maintain our position here. The day will come, in fulfillment of what has been spoken, when the sinners in Zion will tremble; in that day greater power will be made manifest on behalf of His people than we behold now. I do not believe that God has ever raised up a people in any age of the world that had any greater blessings than He has bestowed upon the Latter-day Saints. I do not think there has ever been a people that has been so highly favored in obtaining promises from the Lord. Here we have the Bible, the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. What glorious promises there are contained in them respecting this people, many of which were given in our day, through the mouth of Joseph Smith. I have often thought while reading that remarkable "vision" given to Joseph and Oliver, what godlike and eternal language is there made use of; and am fully satisfied that no man in the flesh could use such language conveying such truths, unless he were inspired of heaven; and no man could bring forth, as he did, such glorious, eternal principles, revealing them to the world, unless by the inspiration and power of God. The language itself, coming from the mouth of an unlearned young man, speaks for itself in accents loud, to all men, whether believers or unbelievers. Let me admonish you, my brethren, again to draw near unto God. Seek earnestly on the principles of righteousness alone to obtain the Spirit of the Lord more abundantly. This we need; without it no man can magnify his calling. No man as an Apostle or Elder, bearing the holy Melchisedek and Aaronic Priesthood, can magnify that calling without the constant aid of this Spirit; our works would not be acceptable before Him.

Now, with regard to those blessings given unto us. Joseph Smith began his education with the first communication with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, and then he continued to receive instruction through the visitations of angels—men, holy and perfect men who had lived on the earth, but were now resurrected and ministering servants of God to man; prominent among others was Moroni, who lived on this American continent, who had charge of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; then there were Moses, Elias, Elijah, John the Baptist, Peter, James and John, and others. Hence the Prophet Joseph received visitations from heavenly beings who talked to him face to face as one man talks with another. There was no vision about such manifestations, as he was in his natural, normal condition when in their company; when their hands were laid upon his head, ordaining him to the Aaronic and Melchisedek Priesthoods, and their teachings were to him the same as those of Brother Joseph would be to us, were he to appear to us in his resurrected body and teach us face to face. But when Joseph and Sidney were wrapped in vision, as they were on the occasion when they received the vision to which I have referred, they occupied the same position as did Paul; when he said, speaking of himself, "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body I cannot tell; or whether out of the body I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven;" where, he goes on to say, he heard unspeakable words which it was not lawful for him to utter. That was a vision. There is a difference between the administration of angels, and receiving visions; in the former mode of receiving heavenly instruction, the messengers come to earth and talk face to face with the creature, man; in the latter, the person is caught away, as it were, and is lost for the time being to earthly things. Some men, in my opinion, while they put great weight upon these words of