

How Judgment Should Be Formed—Effects of the Gospel—Wherein is the Efficacy of Baptism—Who Are Benefited By It—Persecutions Endured By the Saints—Effects of Persecution

Discourse by Apostle Erastus Snow, delivered in the Stake Meetinghouse, Ephraim, Saturday Afternoon (Quarterly Conference), May 31st, 1884.

Truly we are a blessed people. Of all people upon the face of the earth we have most reason to be thankful that the Lord our God has been mindful of us, and has set His hand the second time to recover Israel.

The prophet Isaiah in the 11th chapter of his book says:

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:”

“And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;”

“And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears:”

“But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”

I understand this to have reference to our Savior who, after the flesh, was a descendant of Jesse, Jesse being the father of King David. Out of the stock of Jesse came the royal house that not only ruled in Israel anciently, but the Savior, who is appointed of His Father to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords, because He is anointed to be the Savior of mankind, and when He comes the second time, according to the revelations of St. John, He will have the name I have mentioned.

“And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears:”

“But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth.”

This, too, is a lesson for all his people—for His Servants who minister on the earth, for the judges in Israel, the Bishops, High Councils—not always to judge after the sight of the eye nor to “reprove after the hearing of the ear, but with righteousness shall he judge the poor.” Sometimes we find the poor oppressed, though this is not common among the Latter-day Saints, who are influenced, generally, by a spirit of charity and love; but sometimes in our midst, as in the world, people are accused wrongfully, things are misrepresented, and for this reason the prophet speaks of the Savior as he does. We are not always able to determine with certainty the character of any transaction—that is to say, of the spirit and motive that influence and promote action—merely from what we see, nor yet from what somebody may tell us. It is necessary that we become enlightened by the Holy Spirit, to enable us to see as God sees, and to understand the motives, purposes and designs of the hearts of our fellow men. God judges us all according to the motives and designs of the heart. If our purpose is to do good, and that which is right in His sight, he judges us accordingly, though we may, through our weakness, or through circumstances that we are not always able to control, do things that are not strictly in their outward appearance right and correct, or we may neglect to do that which we should do. The Lord judges all men according to the motives that prompt the action, rather than from the action itself. It is not murder in the sight of heaven always, when a man is killed, for sometimes he brings his blood upon his own head by thrusting himself upon some other one to destroy him and is himself slain in the attack, and his blood is therefore upon his own head, and it is not counted murder to the man that slew him. The one who only saw a part of the transaction might accuse the other of murder; but when it comes to be sifted to the foundation, and both hearts can be scanned, and the cause that resulted in the conflict discovered, it is found that the man that slew is innocent, and the man that was slain is the guilty one. I refer to this as a sample. So with many of the transactions of life. So also we may neglect duties that we should attend to, but we neglect them in our ignorance, when we are uninformed, and the Lord does not lay it to our charge until we

are better instructed and our defects pointed out to us. Then if we neglect them He holds us responsible for that neglect. So also we may do things that in themselves are not right, not strictly correct, and yet if we are not posted and are ignorant of the evil of the transaction, it is not imputed to us as evil. This is the doctrine that Jesus laid down. "That servant, which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." That is, a few stripes shall be meted out to him merely to vindicate the law, and to make an impression upon him that what he had done was wrong, though he was ignorant of it before; but a little punishment is meted out, just enough to satisfy and vindicate the law, and to correct the impression upon the individual, to show him that he must be careful, for he had trodden upon forbidden ground. This is a rule that our Father is governed by in judging His children, and it is a rule that we should strive also to be governed by in regard to one another, and especially those who are called to be judges in Israel, or whose calling and duty it is to settle difficulties and assist in adjusting differences among their brethren and sisters.

"And he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked."

I understand this to be a figurative expression of the Prophet Isaiah: the rod of His mouth by which He should smite the earth. I understand that to be the word that proceeded out of His mouth, the words given of His Father; for His word was that which He received from the Father, and that which goeth forth among the children of men, conquering and to conquer. It is that word that has made impressions upon the Latter-day Saints in other lands and countries where they were born, and brought them to believe and obey the Gospel, and gathered them to this land. And it is that word also which condemns the wicked, and therefore the prophet says:

"With the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked."

For the Gospel of life and salvation is a savor of death unto death, or of life unto life. So says the Apostle Paul. It was so in his days, in the days when Jesus and His Apostles first proclaimed this Gospel to the Jews in Palestine; when they went among the Gentiles it was the same. It is the same today. It has been the same in all ages of the world. When the Gospel is sent forth, the word of God among the people, it is a savor of death unto death, or of life unto life. Therefore while the righteous are governed and exalted and blessed through the word, the wicked perish. This is illustrated in another form of expression by the Apostle Paul, when he says that he was slain through the law. Says he:

"For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."

He is using this illustration to the Jews—"Sin revived, and I died"—that is, when the law was made known—when the will and commandments of God were revealed and made known, woe! be unto those who should hear and disobey, for if they disobeyed condemnation would follow. This illustrates the principle contained in this verse I have read from Isaiah:

"With the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked."

And this is equally true of his fellow laborers and servants who have the word of God in faith, and speak in the name of the Lord, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, and have authority so to speak and act. Their testimony, their words, and the counsels of God that go unto the people through them, are a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. The Gospel exalts those who receive it, and brings condemnation and destruction upon those who refuse to obey it. But without the Gospel being sent out by authority and power from God, the inhabitants of the earth could not be ripened for destruction. We read in many places in the Scriptures concerning the destruction of the wicked in the last days. But we read also in other Scriptures, that the Lord destroys them only when they are ripe in their iniquity. Jesus, in prophesying of His second coming, and the destruction that shall fall upon the wicked, speaks in this wise—that they shall fill up the cup of their iniquity. This principle we see referred to and illustrated in the days of Abraham. The Lord promised unto him the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. Nevertheless, his seed must be brought into bondage in Egypt, and remain there until those who dwelt in the land of Canaan had filled up the cup of their iniquity. The people were not yet ripe for destruction, and therefore the

Lord could not displace them and put Abraham and his seed in possession of his land.

So the Lord has dealt with nations and generations from the beginning, and so will He in the latter times. We need not marvel because the Latter-day Saints are everywhere spoken against, and the wicked conspire to overthrow them. We need not marvel that even in this boasted land of freedom and liberty, statesmen, rulers and judges should place the iron heel of oppression upon the Latter-day Saints, and seek by every way in their power to bring evil upon them, to discourage them, to hedge up their way, and to destroy them. They must needs do these things. They must needs harden their hearts against the Lord and against His commandments. They must needs do many things that are wicked in His sight and oppressive to His people, in order that God may judge them, and that they fill up the cup of their iniquity. And it must needs be that the Saints, too, should be tried in all things even as Abraham was tried when he was commanded to offer up his only son. It must needs be that when the Gospel found us in our scattered condition mid the nations of the earth, and we yielded obedience to it, that we should be despised of our fellow creatures, that we should be reviled, so that we should feel it a pleasure to leave our fatherland, the graves of our ancestors, the home of our youth and childhood, and gather to Zion. Were it not for these two things that are working in the earth we should not be gathered together; we should not be willing to do it; we should love the home of our ancestors and the country that gave us birth. But because of the persecutions and hatred of the wicked we are weaned from them. As the Savior said on a certain occasion:

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I come not to send peace, but a sword.”

“For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

“And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.”

At first thought it would seem a strange idea that the Prince of Peace, whose birth was announced by angels to the shepherds saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”—I say, at first thought it would seem strange that the Prince of Peace so announced should say:

“I come not to send peace, but a sword * * * I am come to set a man at variance against his father, etc. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.”

But it is all easily explained by our experience and observation, and by considering His teachings and the effects thereof and the words of the Apostle concerning the preaching of the Gospel being a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. We go out into the Gentile world, and we find a great variety of religious opinions and many different religious sects. We find Catholics, Protestants, and various denominations and sects of Protestantism. They are all laboring together in the same field, preaching different doctrines and items of faith, and all professing to be the religion of Christ. All their teachers profess to be preachers of the Gospel, and their followers all profess to be Christians, and yet there is not power enough in all the doctrines and systems that they are teaching and establishing to produce a separation between the righteous and the wicked. They all continue to harmonize together—at least so far that they all count each other Christians, and it is very difficult to distinguish the Christian from the infidel, unless it be that the Christian is the worst. But not so when the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached. It always did produce a separation between the righteous and the wicked. It drew the line of distinction. It was always like putting yeast into a beer barrel. It sets it to working, and whoever has examined a beer barrel while the beer is working in it under a microscope, will see the way that the beer works itself clear. It is by the different properties it contains running in different directions. You will see the liquid full of little animals running in different directions, and it continues to work in this sort of a way until it becomes clear. Well, the working of beer in a barrel reminds me of the preaching of the Gospel in the earth. It sets Saints to running together. It works out apostates from among us, and they take the opposite direction. It draws the line of distinction between the righteous and the wicked, and that work begins from the moment the Gospel is sounded among the people. The Spirit of truth operates upon the hearts of those who are open to receive it. It draws them to the fountain of life and light. It draws them into the water and then to Zion, and then keeps drawing them nearer and nearer to God; while with those that reject the Gospel, they keep going further and further from the Lord and

His people. They harden their hearts more and more against them, and give way to wickedness and all manner of corruption. But while the wicked on the one hand are thus filling up their cup of iniquity, the righteous, on the other hand are called to sanctify themselves and be prepared for the glorious coming of the Savior. It is for this cause that we build temples, and that God reveals to us the ordinances for the sanctification of His people and further glory and exaltation.

The ordinance of baptism, simple as it is, is appointed by the Father as the firstfruits of repentance—that is, baptism in water for the remission of sins. He did not appoint Presbyterian baptisms and Roman Catholic baptisms, sprinkling a little water on the forehead and calling that baptism. God never appointed these. There is no place in the Bible to indicate that He ever sanctioned such a thing. The Savior set the example to the human family himself, in going down into the water and being immersed in the river Jordan by John the Baptist. But this same order of baptism had been revealed before this: but that there needs be no mistake the Savior set the example before all the people, and then continued himself to baptize for a season in the same manner and ordained His Apostles to continue the work. And He has appointed that all those who receive this ordinance in His name may receive also the resurrection of their bodies, and baptism, or immersion in water, is in the likeness of the death and burial and resurrection of our Savior. By this ordinance we show forth unto the Lord that we lay off and bury the old man of sin in the waters of baptism, and by rising out of the waters of baptism we show forth unto the Lord that we put on the new man after Christ Jesus, and walk henceforth in newness of life. All those, therefore, who believe the Gospel, and yield obedience to its requirements, and are baptized in water for the remission of their sins, upon this act, if they continue to maintain this faith, they are entitled to be raised in the likeness of the glorious resurrected body of Christ. And yet, to consider this ordinance in the abstract, or as the unbelieving world look at it, we might ask what virtue there is in this ordinance of baptism? We might say, as did Naaman, the Syrian, to Elisha, when he came to be healed of his leprosy. The Prophet told him to go and wash himself seven times in Jordan. But Naaman rose up in a rage and said, in substance, “Have I not washed myself many a time in my rivers at home, and did it ever do me any good? Is there any more virtue in the waters of Jordan than the waters of my native place?” He did not believe the Prophet, and he turned to go away with a sorrowful heart. But his servant followed him and said: “My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?” This caused Naaman to reflect; and he went and dipped himself seven times in Jordan. He was not healed when he dipped himself once, nor twice, nor thrice; but when he had dipped himself seven times he was cleansed of his leprosy. Was it the waters of Jordan that healed him or is it the waters of the brook that we are immersed in that cleanses us from our sins? Not at all. It is the blood of Christ that was shed for the sins of the world that cleanseth us from our sins; but the water is the emblem and the means by which we comply with the commandment of God.

And so with every other ordinance of the Gospel. So with the laying on of the hands of the Elders of Israel. The wicked will ask what virtue there is in the imposition of the hands of the Elders? Why, the virtue consists in obeying the commandments of heaven. For through the laying on of hands the sick are healed. Through the laying on of hands the Holy Ghost is given. Through the laying on of hands the Priesthood is conferred upon those who are counted worthy to receive it. Herein is the hiding of the Lord’s power. It is this that the Prophet Habakkuk refers to when he speaks of the Lord coming in glory, and says: “He had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.” Horns we know in the Scriptures are often used as figures to represent power. Horns in the Apocalypse and in the prophecies of Daniel represent kingdoms and dynasties, and when one horn fell, another came up in its place, thus representing the fall of one dynasty and the rising of another. And so on. And the same may be said of the Priesthood: the ruling power that God bestows for the salvation of the human family, is that which is given by the laying on of hands. But does this apply to the wicked, to the disobedient, or to the unbelieving? No, not at all; nor does remission of sins come to the wicked and unbelieving by merely being baptized. We have an example of this kind in the New Testament when Philip baptized the people of Samaria, and Simon the sorcerer, was baptized also; but he was a hypocrite and a corrupt man, and he only sought to gain power whereby he might hoodwink and deceive the people and filch money from them. And when Peter and John came down and prayed with the people, and laid their hands upon them, they received the Holy Ghost. When Simon saw this, he offered them money saying, “Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.” This he sought, as I have said, that he might obtain power to carry on his craft and to

make money; but Peter answered him saying, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. * * * I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." There are other similar instances. But remission of sins cometh by baptism to those who believe and repent of their sins with all their hearts; the Holy Ghost is received by the laying on of the hands of the Elders; and the powers of the Priesthood are conferred in the same manner. Simple as the ordinances are, simple to look upon and to think upon, there is power in them, power accompanies them, power is made manifest among the people. The people are gathered together; the people are made one; the differences that existed among us depart. The traditions of the fathers are cast away. We are united in receiving the light and truth from above. Our hearts are made as one, no matter where we were born, or what race of people we have sprung from. This spirit working among the people, and going abroad in the earth is accomplishing what the Lord and His servants have predicted. It is preparing a people for the coming of the Savior.

Persecution begins, as I said, when the Gospel is sounded in our ears in various lands and countries of our home and birth. It follows us up. When we were a small people organized resistance and persecution commenced by townships in the United States. As we grew and became a stronger people, more extensive organizations were arrayed against us by counties or larger communities. At first the Latter-day Saints were driven from their homes in the State of New York, and they fled to Kirtland, Ohio, where persecution was again waged against them, until by and by the opposition was combined to such an extent in all the surrounding country, that they were obliged to flee from that region to Missouri. Here opposition became still more extensive until the whole State rose up against them—rose up and became a mob, even Governor Lilburn W. Boggs, of Missouri, became a sort of Solicitor General for the mob, and issued an exterminating order against the Saints, as utterly illegal as the decree of any tyrant that ever lived. In that order he called upon his aids and principal generals to rally the militia of the State to execute the order of extermination that he issued. They despoiled us of our goods. They compelled us to sign a deed of trust of lands, houses and possessions to defray the expenses of the "war," as they termed it. That is, they robbed us, and drove us out of the State, and then compelled us to give them what we had, to pay them for doing it. Persecution still followed us in the States of Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri, and finally the Saints fled to these Rocky Mountains where there was nobody to oppose us, save the savages who roamed throughout the country. Here the Lord has planted our feet and made us strong. But it was predicted in early times that we should not only be persecuted by townships and counties, but by and by States should rise against us, and at last the whole United States would rise up against us. But in the midst of it all we have continued to grow, we have waxed strong. It is the power of God and not of man. It is by the word of God that we thrive. It is by the word of God that we are multiplying and increasing in the land; and the same God who commands the Elders of Israel to take the daughters of Israel to wife and who says "multiply and replenish the earth"—that same God sends the fruit and multiplies the sons and daughters of Israel in the land; as, when you sow the seed in the soil He sends the rains and gives a bountiful crop in your fields. It is the blessing of God that is resting upon the people. His people are multiplying in the land, and they are spreading abroad and possessing it in Idaho and Montana in the north, and Arizona and New Mexico in the South. The wicked are determined to persecute and drive us. Where will they drive us to? They say the "Mormons" must go. Where shall we go to? We have become like a city that is set on a hill, we cannot be hid. We have become a strong people, and they do not know what to do with us. Every drop of innocent blood which they shed, will spread the Gospel the faster. Every time they persecute us they will assist the work of God. "Mormonism" is like the mustard plant whose seed is ripe: when shaken it spreads the faster; or like the man I read of when I was a boy. When Canada thistles began to spread in the eastern States, this man was determined that he would put an end to them so far as his farm was concerned. So when the first thistle made its appearance he built a log heap over it and burned the pile. He thought he had squelched the thing; but to his horror and dismay the whole heap, the next year, was a dense mass of Canada thistles. So with "Mormonism," the more they "squelch" it, the faster it grows.

God bless you in the name of Jesus. Amen.