

Importance of the Work of God—“The Kingdom of God or Nothing”—Apparent Insignificance of the Church at First—Its Growth—Ancient Men of God—Personal Reminiscence—What is Required of the Saints—How Joseph Smith’s Prayers Were Answered

Discourse by Apostle Wilford Woodruff, delivered at Nephi, Saturday Afternoon, January 27, 1883.

We meet with the Saints of the several Stakes at the Stake Quarterly Conferences for the purpose of giving instruction which all need in order to qualify themselves to magnify their calling as Saints of God, engaged in establishing and building up the Church and kingdom of God. And I will here say, as I have often said, that all men, and all women, regardless of the position they occupy, or the office they hold, are dependent upon the Lord for His Spirit to assist them in their labors.

I made a covenant with the Lord, years ago, that whatever He would impress me to say, I would preach to the people. If we are not able to speak to your edification, it is not because there are not truth and knowledge, principles and laws sufficient within the pale of this Church, and connected with the work in which we are engaged. I look upon the cause of God and the mission that He has given each of us connected with it, as requiring the whole attention, the might, mind and strength of each one of us, in order to magnify our calling and accomplish the work committed to our hands.

The Lord raised up Joseph Smith specially to do the work that he performed. He was ordained and appointed before he was born to come upon the stage of action in this age of God’s mercy to man, through the loins of ancient Joseph who was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to lay the foundation of this great and glorious dispensation—a dispensation that will be marked and distinguished in the annals of human history for its grand and mighty, and also its serious and awful events. The day has already dawned when the light of heaven is to fill the earth; the day in which the Lord has said that nothing should be kept hidden, whether it be things pertaining to one God, or many Gods, or to thrones, principalities or powers; the day in which everything that has been kept from the knowledge of man ever since the foundation of the earth, must be revealed; and it is a day in which the ancient prophets looked forward to with a great deal of interest and anxiety. It is a day in which the Gospel is to be preached to every nation, tongue and people for a witness of what shall follow; a day in which the Israel of God who receive it in their dispersed and scattered condition are to gather together to the place appointed of God, the place where they will perform the “marvelous work and wonder” spoken of by the ancients who, in vision, saw our day; and where they will begin to inherit the promises made to the fathers respecting their children. The work that is to be so marvelous in the eyes of men has already commenced, and is assuming shape and proportions; but they cannot see it. It will consist in preaching the Gospel to all the world, gathering the Saints from the midst of all those nations who reject it; building up the Zion of God; establishing permanently in the earth His kingdom; preparing for the work of the gathering of the Jews and the events that will follow their settlement in their own lands, and in preparing for ourselves holy places in which to stand when the judgments of God shall overtake the nations. This is truly a good work; and it is a marvel (when we look at it with our natural eyes) how this people are sustained in their faith and hope of accomplishing it, besides having to provide for the wants of themselves and families, which is of itself as much as most men can accomplish. We cannot do the work which God through us intends to have done, unless we place ourselves under His care and direction, and take the sentiment, “The Kingdom of God, or nothing,” for our motto, as well as the end and aim of our life. This we must do to be truly the servants of God. We cannot serve God and mammon. We cannot build up the Kingdom of God and withhold our hearts from Him. We must either come under the dominion of God, and be led and directed by Him, or under the dominion of Satan, and be ruled over by him. It is for us, through our faith and works, our desires and course of life, to choose which we will take, as we must take the one side or the other.

Nobody in this world has cause to rejoice as we have. None have the encouraging future before them that we have; for Zion is not to be moved out of her place, neither is “the kingdom” to be given to another people. God

rules and reigns, and we are His people, and He is our God.

This work, this marvelous work and a wonder, the work that will eventually fill the whole world—and neither man nor the devil can prevent it—commenced, as all the works of our God begin, in a small way. It was likened by the Savior to the mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds, put in the soil, which grew until the fowls of the air could lodge in the branches thereof. This certainly is the characteristic of this Church and Kingdom, commencing as it did on the 6th day of April, 1830, with only six members. But the Lord told Joseph in one of the revelations that he was laying the foundation of a great work, how great he knew not. Joseph was young at that time, and could not comprehend fully the nature of the work which he had been called and appointed to commence in the earth.

When Joseph presented to the Christian world the principles that God had communicated to him, he at once aroused their prejudices; he had to struggle against traditions which they had inherited from their fathers who knew not God nor His ways, traditions which had come down to them through the ages, which were antagonistic to the saving truths of heaven. And hence his life was one continual struggle, meeting with opposition on every hand, especially from the priests of the day; but he lived through it and rejoiced greatly in his labors until he finished his testimony in the flesh, after laboring some fourteen years to that end. He had to wade through deep waters; but he never was discouraged or disheartened, notwithstanding he had to contend against foes without and foes within. He never lost sight of the majesty of his calling, nor the divinity of this work; but spake and acted in the midst of the people under all circumstances the man that he was—the Prophet of God, the Seer and Revelator of the last dispensation. He left us under painful circumstances, sealing his testimony with his blood; but his works follow him. The Gospel of the Kingdom which he preached, flourished under the wise administration of God's servants who followed him. The Lord blessed and sustained His Apostles, and led them to this land, where the standard of Zion has been planted, which begins already to attract the notice of the nations afar off. And here in this land, notwithstanding the difficulties we have had to wrestle with, incident to settling a new country a thousand miles from civilization, having also to protect ourselves against the raids of the wild and untutored Indians, the Lord has prospered us, and blessed us on every hand; and we are today a blessed people. Yet the Christian world is opposed to us, and the Christians generally hate us. The Savior himself had the same spirit and feeling to contend against. There was no man more unpopular than He; no man more persecuted than He. And why? Because He preached false doctrine? No. The real reason was, as He himself declared, because they loved darkness better than light, because their deeds were evil. There are but the two powers, that of God and that of the devil. There is but the one true and living God, and He is our Eternal Father, the creator of this earth: and He will give it to His children to inherit.

We are nearing the end of the 6th thousand years. We have the history, or a partial history, of the dealings of God with the nations from the day of Father Adam down as contained in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, from which we may learn many valuable lessons. God has raised up at different ages certain men to do a certain work, as He raised up father Abraham. He was a noble spirit, we are told, before he left the realms of glory to come and tabernacle in the flesh. He had the spirit of the Gods with him when he was born; and he was faithful to God, and He had confidence in him; and whatever God required at his hands, he performed. So with Enoch. He stood at the head of the dispensation in which he lived. He, in the course of time, some 350 years, built and perfected the city called Zion. He, however, met with all kinds of opposition from the people among whom he labored; but the power of God was manifested to such an extent that his enemies stood and trembled through fear; and through that power he was enabled to perform the mighty work which he and his people did; it was not because the devil and his party were any more kindly disposed towards the Saints of God, but because they could not help themselves; and in the wisdom of God Enoch and his people and their city were taken away from the earth.

The devil in different ages has made war against the Saints and overcome them; and he has tried his best to destroy this Church and Kingdom. As I have said, Joseph and the first Elders met with the fiercest kind of opposition; but, with some exceptions, we have stood it all, and are the better today for having passed through the fire. When we went upon our first foreign mission, Joseph said to us, "No matter what may come upon you, round up your shoulders and bear it, and always sustain and defend the interests of the Church and Kingdom of God." When we took our departure his demeanor in parting was something that I had never noticed or experienced

before. After crossing the Mississippi River I crawled to the side of a house and lay down upon a side of sole leather, while suffering from the chills and fever. While resting there the Prophet Joseph came along and saw me. He gave me some parting advice in answer to some remarks made, and then told me to get up and go on, and all would be well with me. That is the way I parted with him upon that occasion. From that day to this I have noticed the steady growth and increase of this people. We have nothing else to do but to build up the Kingdom of God. If we do this He will keep us and provide for us. We want to labor as a body of Priesthood, to enter into the holy of holies; we want to come before God, and pray until we get the spirit of this work, until we comprehend our calling before God.

There has never been such a dispensation upon the earth as the present one. In other dispensations men had to lay down their lives, and others to hide up in dens and caves of the earth, and wander in sheepskins and goatskins, for the word of God. We have had a taste of the same treatment in our day. And we have also seen days of poverty. When for instance, we left to go on our first English mission, two dollars would have bought everything I left to feed and clothe my wife and children. I hardly had a day's provisions in my house. It was a good deal so with my brethren; but we did not stay to nurse our wives. Those were the days of our poverty; and we never knew what it was to be comfortably well off until we came to these valleys of the mountains. We had a great many trials in those days or what we called trials. I want to get this principle into your minds, that God Almighty is guiding the course of this Church and Kingdom, and not we; and He has organized it for this day and generation and it never will be rooted out of the earth again. The Prophet Joseph knew what he was doing; in fact, he knew much more than he dared to tell on account of the prejudice, traditions and unbelief of the people. I used to have peculiar feelings about his death and the way in which his life was taken. I felt that if, with the consent and good feelings of the brethren that waited on him after he crossed the river to leave Nauvoo, Joseph could have had his desire, he would have pioneered the way to the Rocky Mountains. But since then I have been fully reconciled to the fact that it was according to the program, that it was required of him, as the head of this dispensation, that he should seal his testimony with his blood, and go hence to the spirit world, holding the keys of this dispensation, to open up the mission that is now being performed by way of preaching the Gospel to the "spirits in prison." But those who shed his blood, and the people and nation who sanctioned it in their hearts, have that to meet, and they can no more escape the penalty thereof than they can escape the death of the body. My views and feelings in regard to the Twelve and leading men of this Church have been this, that when they leave this stage of action they will be permitted to lie down in peace surrounded by their families and friends; and also, that God will never require them to stain their hands with the blood of their fellow men, in order to protect themselves from violence; but, that the Lord will fight our battles, and frustrate the measures that would lead to such an issue. And the wisdom of this is manifested in the fact that part of our duty is to build Temples, and officiate in the same; and this we could not do so acceptably to God if our hands were stained with the blood of our fellow men, even in our own defense. Hence I believe that God will cause the wicked to slay the wicked; and that He will cut off our enemies by judgment from time to time, as it shall be deemed prudent by Him. All is peace in Zion, and I thank God for it. I am reminded of a saying made by Brother Cannon upon entering the well furnished parlor of one of President Merrill's houses, of Richmond, in Cache County. "What," he said, "all this and heaven too?" Yes, God intends to give to His Saints the good things of the earth, as well as the blessings of heaven, as they shall become able to use them properly.

The Lord intends to build up His Zion through us His weak and feeble creatures. He intends to make Zion strong and powerful in the earth. He will bless us with means and He will put it into our hearts to build Temples to His name, in which His Saints may perform the work that is required at their hands in redeeming their dead.

Brethren and sisters, you should live by faith, realizing every day that all power rests with God, and that it is through Him that we are able to live in peace and enjoy plenty; that it is through Him the wrath of our enemies is turned aside from time to time, and that it will be through Him that the remainder of their wrath will be restrained. You should enter your secret closets, and call upon the name of the Lord. Many of you have learned how to pray; then fail not to let your prayers ascend up into the ears of the God of Sabaoth; and He will hear you. I think sometimes that we do not fully comprehend the power that we have with God in knowing how to approach Him acceptably. All that these men holding the Priesthood, and all that our sisters need do, is to live near to God, and call upon Him, pouring out their soul's desires in behalf of Israel, and their power will be felt, and their confidence

in God will be strengthened. But the blessings of heaven can only be obtained and controlled upon the principles of righteousness. I have heard the Prophet Joseph pray when the power of God rested down upon him, and all who heard him felt it; and I have seen his prayers answered in a marvelous manner almost immediately. Governor Reynolds on one occasion employed men to try and kidnap Joseph, and they almost accomplished their designs, but Joseph had some Gentile friends as well as his brethren, through whom he was rescued, and was taken to Nauvoo and released under a writ of *habeas corpus*. But the Governor continued to harass him with writs, and was determined to destroy Joseph. Joseph and the Twelve went before God in prayer, Joseph kneeling before the Lord, offered up prayer, and asked God to deliver him from the power of that man. Among other things he told the Lord that he was innocent before Him, and that his heart was heavy under the persecutions he endured. In about forty-eight hours from that time word reached Joseph that Reynolds had blown his brains out. Before perpetrating the deed he left a note on his desk stating, that as his services were not appreciated by the people of the State, he took that course to end his days.

There is another instance that occurs to my mind. A certain man took a stand against Joseph, and endeavored to bring persecution on him. He went to his God and laid the matter before Him, asking to be delivered out of the hands and power of that wicked man. Joseph was a Prophet, a Seer, a Revelator. He was acquainted with God; he knew the voice of the Spirit when it spoke to him. After offering up his prayer, the whispering of the still small voice came to him saying, "Wait with patience." The next day that man was taken sick with cholera, and died in a few hours. See how quickly the Lord answered his prayer offered up while a prisoner in Liberty Jail. At that time, Presidents Young, Taylor and several of the Twelve were on their way through Clay County to lay the cornerstones of the Temple, in fulfillment of the revelation given in the Doctrine and Covenants, section 118. Joseph had no sooner called upon God than he was liberated; and his prayer answered to the very letter. The voice of the Spirit again spoke to him, speaking peace to his soul, and telling him that his troubles should be of short duration. It was but a few days when he had the pleasure of shaking hands with his brethren, and enjoying the society of his family and friends. Joseph lived to accomplish the work that was required of him notwithstanding the persistent and determined opposition that he had to contend against. And after his death the work still went on, God and His angels all the while guiding and sustaining by His Spirit the Prophet Brigham. And He will continue to sustain His servants, and through them and His people Israel He will bring to pass the greatest and grandest work that the world has ever known. It is for us to wake up to a sense of our duty, and call upon the Lord in humility, and live near to Him; and our eyes will be opened, as in the case of the young man, the servant of the ancient Prophet Elisha, and we will see that there are more for us than against us; and that the element of opposition tends only to hasten the fulfillment of the purposes of God. Put your trust in God and rely on His promises, living up to the light and knowledge you possess; and all will be well with you whether living or dying. God bless you, Amen.