

Present Opportunities of Obtaining a Knowledge of the Principles of Truth—Importance of Improving Them

Remarks by Elder Charles C. Rich, made in the Bowery, Great Salt Lake City, October 6, 1862.

I feel great pleasure in meeting with the brethren and sisters, having just returned from a mission. I do not speak of this because of a feeling that I am now relieved from a mission, for I feel that I have been on a mission all the time, and I expect to remain a Missionary from this time henceforth and forever. This is the height of my ambition, that I may have the pleasure of laboring to build up the kingdom of God on the earth.

The instructions we have had today have been joyful to my heart, for they are those principles that are calculated to save, to exalt and to prepare us to dwell with the Gods in the eternal worlds. I have often said that of all the people upon the face of the earth the Saints of the Most High God have the greatest reason to be thankful. This is my feeling and has been ever since I embraced the Gospel; and the longer I live, the more I see and experience, the more I feel and know that we are the favored people of the Lord. If we can appreciate this as it is, it will lead us continually to take that course that will be right and proper in the sight of Heaven.

While I have been absent from this Territory I have been laboring wherever my lot has been cast to convince the inhabitants of the earth of the truth of the principles of our holy religion, and to point out to them the path of life, and how far I have been successful I shall leave for a higher power to judge.

I find that we are all like children, so far as knowledge is concerned: that is, we know nothing, excepting what we have learned from others or by observation, and inasmuch as we do not now know anything but that which we have learned, the prospect is that what we may know in the future we shall have to learn. We are in a school, one which our Father has prepared for us, and in which he designs to instruct us, to give us counsel and point out the course that we should take day by day, in order that we may be saved. If we adopt the principles that have been revealed they will bring to us happiness and an abiding joy, and that, too, at the time and in the place where we are in need.

One reason why I consider that we are so much more highly favored than other people is simply this, that in generations that are past and gone there was no man capable of rising up and pointing out the way of life and salvation—there was no man to dispense the blessings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them that were willing to embrace the truth. But it is not so now, for the kingdom of God has been established upon the earth, a knowledge of the ordinances of the kingdom has also been committed to man upon the earth, and the keys of that kingdom have been given, and the principles which pertain to that kingdom can now be taught to us. We have now the power to embrace the principles of life, because they are presented to us by those having the authority to teach. The principles of our religion have emanated from our Father and God, with whom there is no variableness, nor the least shadow of turning; and these principles have been revealed for the express purpose that we might embrace and practice them and thereby bring about our own salvation and secure that happiness which is promised to the faithful sons and daughters of God.

When we are in the world and hear the sectarians teaching their peculiar dogmas about heaven, hell, and many other topics, their discourses sound empty, foolish, and incomprehensible. Their subjects are generally very distant; in fact altogether beyond this world. When we hear individuals talking about having a father and a mother we do not then understand them to be talking about anything that is very remote, but it is something that is right here with us, and so it is with the kingdom of God. When the servants of the Lord commence to teach the human family principles pertaining to that kingdom, it is brought right home to us, so that we can understand it in this present life. This is the way the Gospel came to us when it was first sounded in our ears; it was brought home to us, no matter what kind of place we were in, and it set before us salvation, not after this life particularly, but it offered salvation to us at the time we heard it. The kingdom of God being established on the earth, the salvation of that kingdom was announced in our ears, and we had the offer of its benefits. If we saw proper to embrace the doctrines presented, we had the privilege of doing so; and inasmuch as we adopted and do now adopt the principles of that kingdom it brings to us a present salvation; and if we do not have a present salvation it is for

want of adopting the principles that have been revealed. This is a matter that we should inquire about, and see and know for ourselves whether we have adopted those principles which the Almighty has made known for our salvation. If we have adopted them in our lives, then we are in the path of life and truth, which gives us salvation all the time; but if we have not, then we do not partake of that present salvation which is offered.

When the Savior was upon the earth he told his disciples to pray that his kingdom might come and that his will might be done upon the earth as it is done in the heavens. We might with the same propriety ask in our prayers, that the will of God might be done upon the earth in our day as angels do it in heaven. Is there anything upon this earth that will prevent the establishment of the same principles and the imparting of the same blessings that are enjoyed in the eternal worlds? If there is, the prayer of the Savior which he taught his disciples could not be fulfilled, and we know that our Father in heaven would not set us to do that which could not be accomplished. We can adopt the principles of that kingdom and practice them in our lives, and this will make us precisely what we are praying for.

Happiness is what we are striving for in this life, and this is what we want in the life which is to come. That happiness is obtainable upon the principles of truth and right that have been and that will be revealed from heaven. As I before remarked, we are in a school, and it is our business to be industrious in that school. It is our business to work diligently to learn that which is taught in the school of Christ, to make ourselves acquainted with the principles of salvation as far as revealed unto us. I can say truly and bear testimony that the people have never had to wait for the knowledge of God; the time never has been when it has not been poured out faster than the people were ready to receive. Principles of light and truth have all the time been taught faster than the people were ready to adopt and practice them. It has always been the good pleasure of the Lord, and it is still his wish to enlighten our minds and enlarge our understandings in reference to the things of his kingdom, that we may have just conceptions of his ways, and understand correctly the principles that pertain to the development of all that wisdom and knowledge necessary for our present and future advancement in the principles of eternal life. We should endeavor to appreciate and continually feel thankful for the blessings bestowed upon us, and strive to improve upon all the gifts of God that are bestowed.

There are a great many people, and I have met with some of them, who are very anxious to know all about heaven, the other worlds, and all about the people that dwell in eternity; but I will tell you how I feel, it is that I want to discharge the duties that devolve upon me, and strive to comprehend the object and design of everything that is required of me. We should all seek for a knowledge of those duties that pertain to us at the present time, and we should practice principles that will bring present salvation, and we should labor to learn that which will be both for our present and future good.

What we have been told today is good and strictly true, and we ought to understand that we are as much in the midst of eternity as we ever shall be, and our chances and opportunities for gaining knowledge and salvation here are as good as they will ever be. We have all the opportunities of learning the principles of heaven just as good as we shall ever have. Then if we do not improve upon these opportunities we are certainly to blame, and we are injuring ourselves more than anybody else, and the time will come when, if we are deprived of any blessing, we shall blame ourselves only. We will have it to say that the blessings and salvation pertaining to the kingdom of God were presented and we despised them. Then we will find that the scripture is true which says, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." In view of this, then, it is for us to be awake to that which we have presented to us, to those principles which God has revealed from the heavens, for he has revealed them for the express purpose of having us practice them upon this earth. Those principles were not revealed with the intention that we should wait till we got to heaven, but everything is for us to practice in this life. Now, if we do not adopt the truth in this life, what is there to make us believe that we will adopt it in the life to come? I look upon our opportunities as being as good to know things in this life as they will be to know them in the life to come, for light and truth are before us, and they will only be before us there. We have no time to spare; all our opportunities should be laid hold of. If we have not adopted the principles of salvation in this life, there is no assurance that we shall adopt them in the life to come. What is there to make you and I think that we shall have power to apply them to ourselves hereafter? We ought to think of this, in order that we may be ready day by day for the performance of

any duty required of us; we ought to know the principles so perfectly that we can apply them to the performance of every duty and feel and know that we are right—understand them for ourselves that we may be capable of applying them both in this life and in that which is to come. If we could do this, it would be a very good sign that we could apply these doctrines in the future life; but if we are to be told every day what we have to do, the probability is that we should be in the same situation in eternity.

We have the privilege of working out our salvation before God, and we have the opportunity of testing the practical workings of these principles, and in doing this our minds would expand to see the necessity of our words and our actions being right. Supposing the actions of every man and woman were right and in strict accordance with the doctrines of our religion, where would be the evil? If everybody always said and did right, the evils that we now find in the world would no more afflict the human family.

The evils that we do find grow out of two causes, and mostly out of one, and that one is ignorance. But there are some who are fast to do wrong; others do it ignorantly. There must be means adopted for teaching such persons the way of life, that where they do not know how to do right they may be taught; and then, when they are taught the right and embrace it with full purpose of heart, they can act upon the principles that are right and proper for them in this great school, in which we are being taught by the servants of God those duties that are required of us day by day, even those principles that will produce happiness, contentment and salvation. These things are being pointed out to us from week to week and from time to time, just as they have been this forenoon. How rich these instructions! They will be worth nothing unless we practice them in our lives. We read of a time when the knowledge of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the great deep; and we live in a time when that knowledge is being taught by the Prophets of God, and when it is the privilege of all mankind to be exalted upon principles of obedience to the laws of heaven.

Why are we not divided and distracted as the world are? And especially the country round about us? The reason is, we are and have been taught correct principles. How easy it would be to put the world of mankind right, if they would be set right and if they would hearken to the voice of God. In this age, as in all others, the inhabitants of the earth have been told what would come upon them, but they heed not the warnings of the servants of God. When we view the kingdom of God in the heavens we view it as an eternal kingdom. This is its condition, because truth and nothing but the truth exists with the inhabitants; they are governed by it in all their actions. Let the same principles be with us, and we shall find that the effect produced will be a oneness of purpose; our labors will be to promote happiness upon the earth and our lives will be peaceful ones. It is a good sign for us to adopt those principles that we can test and prove to be good or bad. I am perfectly willing to trust all in this kingdom, and to look to the world to come for an exaltation with the sanctified, and I know that all will be right if I continue faithful.

I can bear testimony that the Saints of the Most High God have not been waiting for labor; there has always been sufficient laid out to occupy their attention, and if they have attended to their duties they have no time to complain of anybody else. There is nothing very difficult for us to do, but there is enough to keep us busy all the time. And there are a great many safeguards which our Father has placed in his Church for the purpose of taking care of the sheep and pointing out to us those individual duties which are daily required at our hands. We find Presidents, Bishops and counselors in every direction, ever ready to impart to us a word of comfort and consolation; and if we are not taught we are to blame ourselves and nobody else. God has always spoken through his anointed servants, through those holding his Priesthood and authority, and he will be obeyed; and it is our duty and the duty of all men to give heed to those instructions and to receive knowledge from God by his servants as well as by his Spirit, for unless we do enjoy that Spirit and be guided by its influences we shall lack the perfection we are destined to arrive at.

We have a great labor to perform, and we have a great enemy to meet and overcome, and therefore it will be well for us to take a safe course and do a few things right, for should we attempt to do many things and fail we shall be sorry for it. I feel to rejoice in the plan of salvation, and I rejoice to have the privilege of laboring to establish these principles upon the earth. The more we do the better we feel. While we see mankind going to ruin because of their wickedness, I rejoice in the prospect of seeing the kingdom of God rising in splendor and greatness, and I do feel

that we have abundant reason to be thankful, for we have been led by the hand of the Almighty from the first organization of this Church.

It is our business as Saints to put away from us everything that is wrong, that tends to corrupt the people of God. We are called upon to honor our callings and to labor to perform what the Bishops and Authorities of the Church require of us. Evil will produce evil, and good will produce good, and a bitter fountain will produce bitter water, and so it is throughout all the ramifications of the kingdom to which we belong. I trust that we shall all so live as to secure happiness and obtain peace with ourselves, so that we may live in peace at home. I do not want to see any of us neglect our own welfare, but I wish to see every Saint live as a man of God, as one who is striving to secure eternal life in the kingdom of our heavenly Father.

If I understand the principles of life and salvation, and with this understanding should lay down this body, I should then continue the good work which I have commenced here. All that wisdom and knowledge which we have obtained we will carry with us to the spirit world, and this, you can readily perceive, would make just about such a heaven on the other side of the veil as we have made on this side. I do not think we would make it much different. Of course we will have to learn beyond the veil as much so as we have need of learning while here. Then, let us endeavor to feed upon those principles of life and salvation day by day, and labor to put them in practice while in this life, then we shall have joy, happiness, peace, and a present salvation right where we are. We have the power to prove these principles all the time, and we can bear testimony to their truth, for we experience their benefits and blessings in our everyday life.

Let us be faithful and love the truth more than we love anything else, for there is a fulness of it offered to us; and we ought to know that there are no other principles or system that has a fulness of truth to offer to us. Now, there is not any of us that would be satisfied with anything short of a fulness of all that knowledge and wisdom which are hid up in the eternal worlds. But we need not think of attaining that position upon any other principles than those offered to us by our heavenly Father, for if we do, we deceive ourselves and are preparing for ourselves disappointment, and at the great day of reckoning we shall find ourselves disappointed, simply because we have not adapted the principles that alone will secure what we want in time and in eternity.

I do not feel to occupy more than my share of the time, but I feel exceedingly well, and, as some of the brethren have remarked, I always intend to feel well, for I intend to do the best I can all the time. When I first embraced the Gospel, I had a testimony of its truth and I have had evidence increasing with me all the day long. I have often remarked to individuals that I would pursue the course that I was pursuing if there was no other life than this; I would do this because it brings the most good, the most happiness, more than anything else I know anything about. Let us be humble and faithful in keeping the commandments of God and in performing the labors that are allotted to us; and sanctify ourselves before God that we may constantly have within us the light of the Holy Spirit; be guided by his Priesthood, that when we come to lay down these bodies we may be prepared for that which is to be enjoyed on the other side of the veil, having been faithful and diligent on this side, which I pray may be the case, in the name of Jesus: Amen.