

Cleave to Light—Coming of Christ—Abominations of the Wicked—Welfare of the Young

Discourse by Apostle Erastus Snow, delivered at the General Conference, held in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Oct. 8th, 1879.

The prophet Isaiah, in speaking of the latter-day Zion, made this singular remark:

“Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion.

“But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel:” etc.,

Again, it has been said concerning the disobedient who reject and set at naught the counsels of the Almighty, through his servants who are sent unto them:

“I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;”

The wicked comprehend not the things of God; they cannot know them, for they are spiritually discerned. “The things of God,” says the Apostle Paul, “knoweth no man only by the Spirit of God;” or, in other words, carnal man knows not the things of God, neither can he understand them. The unbelieving world cannot see as the Saints see; they walk in darkness, but the Saints are the children of light, even as many as keep sacred their covenants with God. The wicked love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. This was true of the first century of the Christian era, when the Savior uttered it; it is true today. As the light shone in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not, so might the same be said today. We are called to be the children of light. Blessed are they who continue in the light, for the day of the Lord will not overtake them as a thief in the night; but woe unto them that depart from, or reject that light that shines in the midst of the darkness, for the day cometh and that speedily, when they will be overtaken as by a whirlwind. The command of the Lord to the Saints is to watch, for we know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man shall come. The precise time of his coming has not been revealed; the prophets were ignorant of it; it could not be declared to the apostles of the Lamb, and, indeed, the Savior said that not the angels, nor even he himself, knew the day or the hour of this important event. And on taking his final leave of the Twelve, on the Mount of Olives, the question was put to him—“Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” They, it seems, were wont to regard the Savior as that Being that was to establish himself upon the throne of David, and bring to pass all that they had been so anxiously expecting; but he told them it was not for them to know the times and the seasons which the Father had put in his power. These things have been spoken that the Saints should watch and not fall asleep. The same idea is also set forth in the parable of the ten virgins, who were represented as having gone forth to meet the bridegroom, five of whom were wise and five foolish. The wise virgins took oil in their vessels, and were prepared to meet the bridegroom and to go with him into the marriage feast; the foolish virgins took no oil, they were unprepared, and were consequently shut out. This parable is expressly applicable to the time of the second coming of the Savior, showing us that however reluctant we may feel to admit it, we are plainly given to understand that a great portion of those who are counted virgins, of the Lord’s people, who believe in his coming and who go forth to meet him, will slumber and sleep, and be locked out when he shall come. And it behooves all Saints to ask themselves the question which the disciples asked the Savior when he told them the startling truth that one of them should betray him—“Lord, is it I?” And all those who are very anxious upon this point will be likely to be on the watchtower, and not slumbering in that fatal hour.

And again, in the 24th of Matthew, he speaks of that wicked servant who shall begin to say, “My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” He expects this of his servants whom he has appointed over his house, to give his children meat in due season. It becomes the apostles, and presidents, and bishops, and all who are called as watchmen upon the walls of Zion to read the 24th and 25th of Matthew, giving due attention thereto, and to beware, lest they be found among those unfaithful

servants who have been appointed to minister in his house and give meat in due season, but who smite their fellowservants, and who eat and drink with the drunkard, and otherwise neglect their high and holy calling, for responsibility, position and station will not be any protection or safeguard in that day. But, on the contrary the greater the responsibility neglected, the greater their fall, chagrin and disappointment, and woe when they find their allotted portion among the hypocrites and unbelievers.

And the enemies of Zion who want to penetrate our sacred and holy places, and who say in their hearts, Let her temples be defiled; let adventurers, profligates and libertines mingle in their family circles, and break them asunder, and defile the daughters of Zion and break up the holy institution of sacred and holy matrimony, by which they are bound together in the new and everlasting covenant for time and eternity; yes, they say, let this covenant be broken, let all who believe and will not deny the laws and commands of God, be excluded from the jury-box, from the ballot box and from official station. And here comes another wail from a member of the Cabinet, in the form of a decision to the effect that all plural wives, who will not break their covenants with their God and their husband, shall be excluded from the right of homestead and pre-emption; and I doubt not but what everything will be done that Satan can put into their hearts to do to block the wheel, to hedge up the way, in order to test the faith of the righteous and their integrity to each other and the principles of truth. But it must be remembered that God permits it, that they may fill up the cup of their iniquity, that the righteous may be proven and tested, even to the core. For God will have a tried people, and those only who will abide in his covenant, even to the death if necessary, will be found worthy of that glory and exaltation in his kingdom which we seek after. It is a day of warning, not of many words; it is also a day of sacrifice. God has a controversy with the nations, but first with those unto whom the fullness of the Gospel has been sent. He will work in his own wondrous way his purposes to perform. It becomes us to be very humble, that we may be worthy to be his instruments in accomplishing his designs.

I rejoice in the testimony of the Spirit manifested by the previous speakers during this Conference. My earnest desire is that the Spirit may spread abroad among all people and take deep root in their hearts, not only throughout the Stakes of Zion, but throughout the earth. Dark clouds may gather around us from time to time; then is the time not to fear, but to watch and pray and patiently await the Lord of Hosts to dispel them and cause the sun to shine again upon us; remembering the vision of Nephi, in which he saw the rod of iron which led to the tree of life, along the turbulent stream of muddy water, and through mists and clouds which at intervals beset his pathway; and that those who clung to it were led safely through and reached the tree and partook of the fruit thereof, while those who ceased their hold to the rod of iron wandered off and were lost.

I have felt the greatest concern for the rising generation among us; they are far more numerous than our foreign immigrants. Secretary Evarts and the Cabinet need have far less fear concerning our foreign immigrants than of those that are constantly coming from the spirit world. The enemies of Zion fear this doctrine of the Saints, that "Children are an heritage of the Lord, * * * and happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them." This doctrine permits the Latter-day Saints to fulfil the first great command given to Father Adam and Mother Eve, instead of adopting that abominable and soul-destroying doctrine of devils, infanticide and feticide, which is practiced to no little extent in the Christian world, which is in open violation to the laws of nature and the law of God to our first parents, to "multiply and replenish the earth." And the practice of this same doctrine is fast depopulating some of our older States; besides, it tends to encourage prostitution; and, strange as it may appear, a future day will yet reveal that among the foremost and prominent votaries of this doctrine of devils are those who fight against Zion and her institution of marriage, under the hypocritical cant as such men as Schuyler Colfax, in his utterance from the balcony of the Townsend House in this city, and Attorney-General Devens, in his argument in the Reynolds case, in effect, that the plural marriage of the Mormons cannot be tolerated, because the burning of widows upon the funeral pile of their husbands was wrong. There is about as much relevancy and consistency in the argument as there would be to say that the practices of the multitudes of families of this Christian land, who are destroying their own offspring and taking villainous compounds to induce barrenness and unfruitfulness, must be tolerated and encouraged, because the practices of the Latter-day Saints are filling these mountains with a thrifty population. It is shown by the statistics that our children under the age of eight years are already nearly as numerous as the lay members of the Church. I feel that too much attention cannot be bestowed upon the rising

generation. Our young people's Improvement Associations, our Sabbath Schools and quorum meetings are all so many aids in the training and education of the young in all that is elevating and praiseworthy. And may God bless them in their earnest efforts to improve the spirits of their fellow men.

There is one thing I wish to call the attention of our presiding officers to, more especially, that of the Presidents of Stakes and their counselors and the Bishops as their aids and assistants, and that is to give more diligent heed to the temporal condition of the families of the Saints over whom they preside, seeing to it that they are suitably and profitably employed. It is an old adage that an idle brain is the devil's workshop; and we all know that the lack of useful and proper employment is the source of numerous evils. It should be our study to introduce new branches of business, devise means of employment, that none may be idle. This is an important duty required of the leading men in Israel; and so earnest should they be in its performance that they make it a matter of faith and prayer, using their utmost endeavors to seek it out by thoughtful study, and by consulting each other, and by inviting the aid of inventive minds. It is important that our schoolteachers should not merely be automatons or parrots in the schoolroom by way of impressing a lesson upon the minds of the children, but strive, in an eminent degree, to direct their minds in a moral and religious sense, inculcating, by precept and example, due respect for virtue, and everything that is pure and noble; having also, as much as practicable a watchcare over them out of school as in school, laboring to enforce punctuality and an honest report, thereby helping their parents to look after them, so that they may not squander away their time foolishly, as many do in our towns and cities, lounging around stores and other places, acquiring habits that are calculated to lead away and defile the minds of the youth. The schoolteacher who is alive to the true spirit of his calling becomes a valuable auxiliary in improving the minds and conduct of our children, and his or her influence, when properly excited, might be of incalculable good.

There has been in times past, and still is, a great tendency among our youth to seek easy berths; and sometimes the acme of their ambition seems to be realized upon a high stool in a counting room, or behind a counter; they desire to shun the hardships through which their parents passed. That is a vain delusion, and it is simply foolishness on the part of parent or child who indulges in it. It is unwise for parents to entertain this spirit, to be anxious to shield their children from the trials of life through which they themselves have passed; no really sensible man or woman would do it. There is no sensible man or woman in the land that would exchange their experience for all the wealth of the world. If any would do it, they have failed to learn their lesson and profit from their experience. Adversity is good for all; prosperity few can fear.

The Presidents of Stakes, with their Counselors, and the Bishops as their assistants, should, when they know of any unoccupied land within their borders that ought to be improved and possessed by the Latter-day Saints get together and select young and middle-aged men who are not already provided with good, suitable homes or means of sustenance, organize them with good and efficient leaders, and send them out to occupy those new valleys, teaching them to do as their fathers have done—teach them to take out the mountain streams, build gristmills, sawmills and factories, raise breadstuff, sheep and cattle, and prepare to live, instead of craving easy berths, and be all the days of their lives dependent upon the will of an employer for a livelihood.

There are many places in our Territory east of us, on both sides of Green River, also in Sanpete, Piute and Kane counties, and in the adjoining States and Territories, that ought to be occupied; for the Latter-day Saints cannot be confined to Utah. Everything indicates the fulfillment of the declaration of the ancient prophet, who said:

"Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes;

"For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left;" etc.

In the very nature of things this must be the case; for we are an aggressive people, not to trample on the rights of our fellow man, but to fulfil the purposes of the Almighty, and possess and make fruitful the waste places. And as the wicked are wasted away through disease, war and bloodshed, murder, infanticide, feticide and the judgments of an offended God, he requires his people to go forth as he shall prepare the way, and possess the land and hold it for God and his kingdom, whose it is, and who will come in due time to reign over it.

Fear not to take to yourselves wives and to multiply and replenish the earth, and occupy the unoccupied regions, and leave it not to your enemies while you are clustering around these mercantile houses and saloons and places of ease and idleness; but break out and face the realities of life. And let no father or mother in their old age indulge childish fancies, and encourage these whinings of their children; but be as courageous as the old hen, who, after scratching for her brood until they are able to scratch for themselves, sends them forth to get their own living.

We do not wish to be compelled to call men to this work of settling up the country; the Twelve and the General Conference have other things to occupy their time and attention, while this work more directly belongs to the Presidents of Stakes. The Twelve, however, are ready to counsel with these brethren and render them all the aid we can. But we don't want the Presidents of Stakes to think that they can do nothing, leaving the Twelve to attend to all such things; that is part of their calling, as fathers in Israel. We wish the country bordering on that occupied by the Lamanites settled by men who know how to behave themselves, and who will befriend that people, and not shoot them down as we would the wild beasts, without cause or provocation, nor give them occasion to be our enemies, to lay in wait to rob and kill; but to cultivate their love and good will which is a common duty of all Saints to all people, but especially to the House of Israel; and set good examples and manifest in all their dealings honesty and integrity, thereby sowing good seed in their hearts, that shall in the due time of the Lord bring forth precious fruit.

We want many earnest, upright young men also to learn the languages of the natives of the American Continent, and also the Spanish language, which is extensively used in Central and South America as well as Mexico, and which is the national language of those countries and of the educated natives who exercise dominion over the ignorant Indians and the mixed races of the Continent. We expect to call many to labor among these people, as the Lord may dictate, and we want them to be prepared to respond when there is a whisper in their ears to that effect.

May God bless you, and help us all to be truly what we are called to be, Saints of the last days, to stand before the Son of Man when he shall appear, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus. Amen.