

The Pleasure and Trials of Missionary Labors—Improvement in the South—Every Gospel Principle Righteous and Essential

Remarks by Elder Wilford Woodruff, delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, May 19th, 1867.

I also am a missionary, and I always considered it a great honor to be one. I received a mission when I embraced this work; it has never been taken from me yet. In company with a number of the brethren I have just returned, as br. Taylor has said, from visiting our brethren in the south. We have had an excellent time. We have been over a great many rough roads, traveled hard, and have preached from once to three times every day. We have been taught, instructed, and edified; at least I have a great deal. We have had a good time in visiting the Saints, and as President B. Young remarked in some of his discourses, we have been able to draw the contrast between preaching to the Saints and preaching to the world. My own experience enabled me to bring that subject home very readily, and I presume it is so with most of the Elders who have been on missions preaching the gospel. I have traveled a great many thousands of miles to preach the gospel without purse or scrip, with my knapsack on my back, and begging my bread from door to door. I have done many things that all the gold in California would not have hired me to do except for the gospel. My natural feelings would forbid me traveling through the world asking for my bread from door to door; I would much sooner labor for it.

We have been called to preach the gospel; the Lord Almighty has required it at our hands; we would have been under condemnation as Elders if we had not done it. We have done it, and our garments, in a great measure, are clear of the blood of this generation. For over thirty years we have labored to preach the gospel; and we have gathered together a people to these valleys of the mountains, with whom I rejoice to meet. I once asked the Lord to let me go and preach the gospel. I had a desire to preach the gospel in its beauty, plainness, and glory, and to show the worth of the principles it contained. I felt that they were of as much value to my fellow men as to me. The Lord gave me the privilege I asked for, and I believe that I have preached to the nations of the earth as much as I desire; if duty should not require it, I never wish to go and preach to the world again. I have had my day and time at it; still, if called to go, I presume I should go as I have always done. But I do enjoy the society of the Saints, I love home, and I love to travel through these settlements, and to see the boys, the girls, the men, and the women parading the streets to welcome the President and his brethren; and, on our return here, to meet with greetings from ten thousand Saints brought peculiar meditations to my mind. It brought home very forcibly the contrast between preaching to the Saints and preaching to the world.

In my early missions, when preaching in the Southern States—Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky—I have waded swamps and rivers and have walked seventy miles or more without eating. In those days we counted it a blessing to go into a place where there was a Latter-day Saint. I went once 150 miles to see one; and when I got there he had apostatized, and tried to kill me. Then, after traveling seventy-two miles without food, I sat down to eat my meal with a Missouri mobocrat, and he damning and cursing me all the time. That is the nature of the Southern people—they would invite you to eat with them if they were going to cut your throat. In those days we might travel hundreds and hundreds of miles and you could not find a Latter-day Saint, but now, thank God, we have the privilege of traveling hundreds and hundreds of miles where we can find but little else. I regard this as a great blessing.

Our missionaries are going abroad under different circumstances from what we went. We had no Zion, no Utah, no body of Saints to give us any assistance. We were commanded to go without purse or scrip, and we had to do it. We trusted in the Lord, and he fed us. We found friends, built up churches, and gathered out the honest and meek of the earth. Times have changed since then. These brethren are going to the nations of the earth where starvation stares many of the people in the face, and where it is hard for millions to obtain the necessaries of life. The people here are wealthy, and it is no more than right that we should impart of our substance to help those who are going on missions. I hope the brethren and sisters will help liberally, and will impart sufficient to send the brethren to their several fields of labor.

I rejoice in the gospel of Christ; I rejoice in the principles that have been revealed for our salvation, exaltation, and

glory. I rejoice in the establishment of the work in these mountains, and in our southern settlements. As has been already said, the Lord has blessed our brethren there. It is a miracle to see those settlements when we consider what the country was such a short time since. The city of St. George is second to none in the Territory unless it be Great Salt City; and I doubt the latter being equal to St. George, when we take into consideration the population of the two places. They have better buildings and improvements there, according to numbers, than we have here. At Toquerville, too, they are laying fine foundations for stone and brick buildings, and they are improving all through the southern settlements. The soil there is so sandy that it looks as if it would require two men to hold it together long enough for a hill of corn to grow. Like the waves of the sea, it is ever on the move. It contains, too, a good deal of mineral which destroys the vegetation and everything with which it comes in contact. Some of the brethren have spent as much as two thousand dollars to render an acre of land productive; now they have fine gardens and vineyards growing, and, strange to say, though the country naturally looks like a desolate, barren, sandy, unfruitful desert, still the cattle are fat, all kinds of stock look well, and everything was green and flourishing in the settlements as we passed through them. The whole of that mission at its commencement presented a most forbidding aspect, and really had so many discouraging features that men were compelled to work by faith and not by sight. Now, however, the soil is blessed, the climate is delightful, and plenty and prosperity attend the labors of the people. To show you the difference of the climate in the country, and of the district of country a few miles this side of it, I need only mention that the morning we left Beaver there was ice along the creeks, but when we got to Toquerville, two days' travel further south, we found the apricots half grown, the peaches as large as peas, the cottonwood trees green and in full leaf, altogether looking like another country. It is a different climate altogether from what it is in these higher places.

The hand of God is in all the operations we are trying to carry out. We have to build up Zion independent of the wicked; we have got to become self-sustaining, and the Lord is inspiring His prophets to preach to us to lay the foundation for the accomplishment of this work. The day is not far distant when we shall have to take care of ourselves. Great Babylon is going to fall, judgment is coming on the wicked, the Lord is about to pour upon the nations of the earth the great calamities which He has spoken of by the mouths of His prophets; and no power can stay these things. It is wisdom that we should lay the foundation to provide for ourselves.

With regard to the Word of Wisdom, I must say I was agreeably surprised to see how generally the people are taking hold of it. We did not see much coffee or tea, and I do not think that one in the company drank a drop of it. I rejoice in this; it is going to make the people more wealthy, it will save us a great deal of means, besides preventing our being poisoned to death, for these things are poisoned, and the Lord understood that when He gave the Word of Wisdom many years ago. The people are improving in a great many things. There is a very good spirit and feeling among them, and the feeling to carry out the purposes of God is general.

I rejoice in this work because it is true, because it is the plan of salvation, the eternal law of God that has been revealed to us, and the building up of Zion is what we are called to perform. I think we have done very well considering our traditions and all the difficulties which we have had to encounter; and I look forward, by faith, if I live a few years, to the time when this people will accomplish that which the Lord expects them to do. If we do not, our children will. Zion has got to be built up, the Kingdom of God has got to be established, and the principles revealed to us have to be enjoyed by the Latter-day Saints. There is no principle that God has revealed but what has salvation in it, and we, in order to be saved, must observe His laws and ordinances. Where is there a man or woman who does not wish to be saved? All wish to be saved; all desire salvation, and to enjoy those blessings which they were created to enjoy. The gospel has been offered to this generation for the purpose of saving them in the Kingdom of God if they will receive it. I rejoice in all the principles revealed to us, and the more I see, hear, and learn, the more I am satisfied of the importance of the revelations that God has given to us. As President Young remarked in one of his sermons south, "Whatever the Lord reveals to this or any other people does not ignore anything revealed before." No part of the gospel is superfluous. It is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and all the inhabitants of this world and all others have got to be saved by it, if saved at all. It is necessary, therefore, that we receive and obey all of its principles. When the first principles of the gospel were revealed to us we rejoiced in them. After them we had other principles revealed, the principle of baptism for the dead, for instance. We did not know anything of that until about the year 1840, on our return from England. I rejoice in that principle.

It is a great blessing that there can be saviors on Mount Zion. It is a glorious principle that we can go forth and erect temples and attend to ordinances for the living and the dead; that we can redeem our forefathers and progenitors from among the spirits in prison. They will be preached to in prison by those spirits on the other side of the veil who hold the keys of the Kingdom of God, and we will have the privilege of attending to ordinances in the flesh for them. Then, again, the blessing that God has revealed to us in the patriarchal order of marriage—being sealed for time and eternity—is not prized by us as it should be. When that principle was revealed, the prophet told the brethren that this kingdom could not advance any farther without it; “and,” said he, “if you do not receive it you will be damned saith the Lord.” You may think this very strange, but the Lord never reveals anything that He does not require to be honored.

What would have been our position if this had not been revealed? This principle is plain, clear, and interesting; without it not a man in this Church could have either wife or child sealed to him for eternity, for all our marriage covenants before were only for time, and we, as a Church, had arrived at that point when, in order to insure a full salvation, it was necessary to reveal this principle. It is a great blessing to us. We love our wives and children, and wish to enjoy their society, but the thought of separation would mar all the happiness that the Saints might otherwise attain. The Saint who aspires to salvation and glory wants a continuation of family ties and associations after death. Without this principle we were like the rest of the world—without any such hope. From the day the apostles were slain until the Lord revealed this principle in the last days, not a man ever dwelt in the flesh who had wife or child sealed to him for eternity, so that he could enjoy their society in the resurrection. That was just our position before this ordinance was revealed, but now, whether we have one wife, two, three, or as many as the Lord sees fit to bestow upon us, when we come forth from the grave our families remain with us in the eternal world. So it is with every principle the Lord reveals—it is good for His people in time and eternity.

Brethren and sisters, let us be faithful, and look at the promises of God as they are contained in the gospel of Christ, and never treat lightly any principle, no matter what it is, whether it be faith, repentance, baptism for the remission of sins, the resurrection of the dead, eternal judgments, the marriage covenant, baptism for the dead, or any other ordinance that the Lord has revealed; they all belong to the kingdom, are necessary to salvation, and the responsibility of carrying them out rests upon this people. We know that the world looks with contempt upon us and upon the institutions of the Kingdom of God. They do not object to institutions that are corrupt and ungodly. The world is flooded today with evil and wickedness, and the earth groans under it. But because we as a people follow the example of Abraham, in taking more wives than one, we are universally decried and despised. The Christian world profess to believe in Abraham, and he, through obedience to the command of God in this respect, was called the “Father of the faithful,” and the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem will each be named after one of the twelve patriarchs, his descendants, and the sons of a polygamist, and fathers of all Israel. Even the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came to lay down his life to redeem the world, was through the same lineage. He was of Judah; He was the King of the Jews and the Savior of the world.

These principles are as righteous today as in any other age of the world when governed and controlled by the commandments of God. Let us prize all the principles, revelations, and blessings that God has revealed to us; let us treasure them up, do our duty to God, to one another, and our fellow men. No man has any time to sin, to steal, swear, or break any of the laws of God if he wishes to secure a full and complete salvation; but we must all do the best we can, laboring with all our might to overcome every evil, for it will take a whole life of faithfulness and integrity for any Saint of God to receive a full salvation in the presence of God.

May God bless us, and give us His spirit, and wisdom to guide and direct us into all truth, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.