

The Object of Gathering—the Happy Effects of Obedience to the Gospel—the Means By Which the Kingdom of God is to Be Established on the Earth

Discourse by Elder Amasa M. Lyman, delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, October 7, 1862.

I do not know that it is necessary for me to tell you that I am glad to be here. If you have but a little of the feeling that influences me, you know very well that I am glad to be here. I am not glad to be here because my mission is ended, for such I do not consider to be the case at all. We often say we have been on a mission, and have fulfilled a mission, and have returned as though that something had been completed and accomplished. I have been on a mission, but I have not come from a mission, or from that mission. I have been on a mission; I have come home on a mission; I am still on a mission. The obligations of that mission, I feel, are not ceasing, not becoming less, but they increase from day to day and from year to year with the increase of knowledge and understanding and the apprehension of the principles of truth. I am here today for the same purpose, for the prosecution of the same labor that I have been in, in every place that I have occupied as a minister of the truth since I first became acquainted with its principles, and by such acquaintance I became connected with the Work of God.

My text is furnished me in the people that are before me today. Who could look upon this assembly and be so dull, so stupid that the inquiry would not arise in his mind, What are we here for? Why all this gathering together of this mixed multitude of people; people from so many nations; people of different tongues, of different customs, different traditions and notions, yet having one and the same feeling in reference to a few of the details that make up the great aggregate of life's actions? For what purpose have we been gathered together from distant nations? Some may have thought that our gathering here was only for the sake of being together, for the sake of creating a multitudinous community. The multitude we see assembled here today are here because the kingdom of God is to be built up; for if the kingdom of God is to be built up, there must be people to constitute it; there must be a people to be ruled, or the rulers would have nothing over which to rule. If the mere assembling of the people together constitutes the kingdom of God now, why has it not constituted the kingdom of God at other times? People have assembled together before; communities have existed before, yet the existence of such communities has not and does not now constitute them the kingdom of God. One reason why the gathering together of the people does not constitute the kingdom of God is, that the mere gathering of the people is not particularly an intellectual operation, it does not of itself particularly inform the judgment or enlighten the mind in reference to God, and man's relationship to God and his purposes.

We commenced our labors with you in lands far distant from this we preached the Gospel to you; listening to that, and receiving the testimony of the servants of God and following the course that was indicated by them, you have become changed in your circumstances and locality. You were located in other parts of the globe and were citizens of other nations, but now you are here located in the peaceful vales of Utah. It is now time for the gathered Saints to begin to learn still more, if they have not already begun to do so; and if they have begun to learn, to continue to learn something of the reason why they are gathered together, that they may be able to discover the true relationship between the actions they perform, the labors, duties and services that are required of them, and the development, increase and growth into strength and power of the kingdom of God on the earth. When we talk about the kingdom of God our thoughts are apt to travel away from scenes of earth, as though it were a matter of the ideas alone and not connected with our earthly operations, labors, duties and services.

There is no action in life, no labor that we perform, no relationship that we sustain to God and one another, but what should be connected directly with the development of the kingdom of God. Says one—"We must become perfect and holy; we must become Godlike; we must become like the angels or like the spirits of the just who dwell with God." This is true; but where is that transformation, that change in our condition, feelings and circumstances to be wrought out—in heaven or on earth, at home or abroad? Where is the school in which we are to be taught the plain, simple, unvarnished administrations of truth in a way to bring it within the range of our feeble comprehension of truth that we may understand it? Are we to learn it in any one place to the exclusion of all others? No. Are we to learn God and truth where we live? Yes. If not, where in Heaven's name do you expect to

learn of him? Do you live in heaven with God and his angels? No; you live here on the earth, here in Utah among the rugged mountains that are around us. All you know you know here, and all you can learn you must learn here while you are here. To acquire a knowledge of God is eternal life. That appears to many to be a great something. I say something, because people know nothing of God. Where are you going to obtain a knowledge of God.

People talk about going to heaven, but when we find ourselves in heaven we shall find that we have reached it, without going to it. Heaven is a development of internal powers and external changes. We learn to know God now as human beings, influenced by the effects of sin and folly, degraded and surrounded with darkness, misery and wretchedness. Shall we wait until these are put off before we can learn of God and get to know that which will constitute in us that knowledge which is eternal life? No. We came here to the valleys of Utah in obedience to the requirements of the Gospel, simply that we might here continue to be taught. We came to this distant region to learn of God. How? By, in the first place, learning ourselves. Can we know God in this way? Yes; we can know him in no other way. We cannot go to where he is, to be taught of him personally and to associate with him. What have we in this world that gives a truthful indication of his character to the mind that is open to the light of truth? We have ourselves been made in the image of God. Then it is essentially necessary that we should learn ourselves as an all-important step to the knowledge of God. We must learn to correct our lives and our actions; we must learn to govern ourselves and sanctify our affections, that we may be prepared to hold communion with heavenly intelligences.

The kingdom of God is established now for the development and increase of its principles within us, to reflect light on the darkness that surrounds us and reveal to our understanding the true relationship we sustain to God, and the reason why the requirements of the Gospel are laid upon us and why we can be saved by listening to them, and why we are not saved if we refuse to listen to them.

When the sound of the Gospel first reached me, I used to have this childish idea, that if I ever knew the truth it must be because the heavens would be opened for me to gaze upon the glory that is within the veil, and this would be the only assurance I could receive that the Gospel is true. I lived under the influence of this idea until I passed measurably from the condition of childhood, of hearing as a child and understanding as a child. When I began to approximate towards a riper condition of mind, I became satisfied that it was not by merely looking at something that the mind became enlightened; that it was not by merely guessing at something that is incomprehensible that knowledge is developed in the soul. I learned that the Gospel was true in a very simple way. The Gospel required me to pursue an upright, just, virtuous, honest course of life with all the world around me and to live at peace with all men. I commenced living in the world without quarreling with anybody; I followed the dictation of the Gospel and its requirements, and it has saved me from war, contention, and strife with my fellow man, from quarreling with my family, with my brethren, with my friends and with my neighbors. In this way I found out that so much of the Gospel was true, and I did not have to go to heaven to find this out neither. This is the way I want you to begin to learn God, and the consequences will be peace and the joy that springs from peace. Then heaven will be in the home where you dwell, in the land and country where you live, in your associations with your friends and neighbors and kindred in all life's varied relations. Another consequence will be a constant indwelling of the Spirit of God; that Spirit that brings life and light, and knowledge and understanding to the soul of man, that quickens the intellect of man and sanctifies every power to hold communion with still higher and holier principles.

We say we want the Holy Spirit; then let us so live our religion that we may have the Holy Spirit, which will improve our condition continually, making us better and better citizens of the kingdom of God with every degree of gain over ourselves. In this way we may cultivate and develop in us individually the principle of immortality that will constitute, when applied to the great body of the people of God, the immortality of his kingdom, the basis of its eternal and deathless perpetuity. Then the development of the kingdom of God in power on earth, temporally, depends upon the self-culture of its members, upon the culture of the feelings that rule the soul and that give character to the action of the creature. When we consider that purity of life is necessary and requisite to qualify a man to be a citizen of the kingdom of God, we shall cultivate that quality and labor for its development and increase. To how many of the infinitesimal details of life's actions does this principle extend? It should extend to them all. We cannot do any wrong that will render us acceptable to God and make us better. That is right which

improves and gives life. There is a right way and a wrong one to all we do.

If we cultivate the ground there is a way which, if pursued, will be fruitful of consequences the most disastrous, while an opposite way will produce profit and reward us for our labors. There is a way that is fruitful of noxious weeds where something better should grow, and this is as truthfully the result of the conduct of the farmer as is the rich harvest of healthy grain that affords him bread and sustenance. Some people think they can pray the weeds out of their fields and gardens, but their prayers can only be effectual when accompanied with a reasonable amount of honest labor rightly and wisely applied. I am in favor of praying. I love to pray myself, and I love to have the Saints pray. But when you have a great many weeds growing on your land, pray for your land, and do not forget to go out on to that land and pull up, remove and destroy by your diligent labor the weed-plants that so much annoy you.

We have been told that the Lord will not plant our grain for us and cultivate our fields. We are here to learn how to do that for ourselves, if we do not know. This part of our education we have to gain, if we have not already gained it; and this will enable us to aid in the building up and development in its greatness and power of the kingdom of God. Let our labor be so applied, that when we bow down before our heavenly Father to ask him to bless anything we have or do, that we can do so consistently. Let us hoe up the weeds and enrich our fields, and ask God to give us a bountiful crop to reward our toils. We will do all we can do, and then ask God to bless that labor and leave the result with him. If your wagon has been fixed in the mud get hold of the wheel yourself and lift all you can, and then ask somebody else to help you if you need help.

There is another field that is equally taxed with the support of a noxious growth: I refer to ourselves at home. We carry about with us our notions, our habits of thought; and our habits of thought give character to our actions. When, for instance, the storm of passion is aroused in our bosom, we yield ourselves up to it without an effort and unresist- ingly allow ourselves to be carried away by its influence from a course of propriety and right, and we do wrong and say wrong things. Let rising anger be suppressed; let the place where it had its incipient being become its grave. Never let the mouth utter the word that should not be spoken. This counsel is just as applicable to myself as it is to you. I have learned long since that I was not called to preach the Gospel because I had no improvement to make on myself, or because I could not become any better. I have come to the conclusion that the more I talk about the right and the less I talk about the wrong, and the more I become occupied with the right the less danger I shall be in of becoming occupied by the wrong. This is good for me, and, being good for me, I recommend it to the Saints. I want them to live peaceably and quietly with one another and learn to do the little things in life's duty right. That we may learn to do this, it is necessary that we should control our passions, for if we do not control them they will control us, and under such control we do wrong. When we control ourselves, the result is equanimity of feeling such as is necessary to the exercise of an enlightened judgment, if such judgment exists within us. Cannot God help us? It altogether depends upon whether we are disposed to help ourselves or not. God will help and bless us when we pursue the course that is acceptable to him. If we strive to subdue stormy passions within us, he will assist us in the good work until the Spirit of God is not merely a casual visitor, but a constant dweller within us to increase our store of knowledge, extend our views and make our conceptions of God and truth more as they should be. Let us live in this way and we shall speak kindly of one another and be more charitable to all men.

The result of our education is differences of feeling and differences in our way of life; we have brought these differences with us from our distant homes. We have brought with us to Utah more or less of the old notions that have grown with our growth and strengthened with our strength; throughout our lives their influence has been upon us. So far as these are in opposition to the truth and the right, they must be overcome, for as we learn the truth we must exchange our incorrect notions for notions that are correct in reference to living with one another and in reference to our general conduct in life. It is not some service we have to perform at some remote place from where we are now living that will benefit us, but it is how we deport ourselves here towards one another and towards God; how we shall make our farms, cultivate our grounds, and how to use that which we have been blessed with as faithful stewards of the manifold mercies of God. We have much yet to learn; the improvements we have not yet made are all to be made, whether they relate to the cultivation of our fields and gardens or to the cultivation of our minds; it is our duty to garnish and embellish them and make them beautiful and lovely as the

residence and heritage of intellectual men and women. This will bring into existence God's temporal kingdom on the earth; then the sanctified and holy and acceptable of his children will dwell in palaces, will be surrounded with wealth, and there will be no desire of their hearts but what may be satisfied. There will be a fountain opened to them where they may satisfy their thirst, however intense it may be for ought that is good, great and ennobling.

Learn, sisters, when you teach the truth to your children who prattle around your knee, and are trying to cultivate a love of it in them, that you are determining their destiny and your own, and their relationship unchangeably with the increase, perpetual and eternal growth of God's kingdom. Think of this, and do not for a moment pass by those labors of love to your children as matters of comparatively little value, for in them are your hopes of glory, heaven, happiness, bliss, and joy in that great future of glory we are looking for. How can a mother teach her children the right if she is reckless of it herself? How can a father do that if he neglects to set before his household the example of propriety that should constitute the constant and ceaseless labor of a father? Then, let us remember that all this work is upon us; it is to redeem the earth, to be learning how to cultivate and improve its condition; it is to bring into existence a holy nation of men and women before God.

Who are they which constitute the bright hosts that worship around the throne of God? They are men and women and children, such as we see here today; intellectual beings like ourselves, who have been educated, taught, trained, led onward and upward from a condition of ignorance to the possession of that infinitude of knowledge that makes so incomprehensible a difference between us. As we are, so were they; and as they are in all their brightness and glory around the throne of God, so may we be with our wives and children, friends and associates in the kingdom of God on earth, when we have traveled along to that state of exaltation to which they have attained, when we have learned to vanquish the monster of sin and death, rising above him to live in the elements of truth and holiness in a state free from corruption and sin. This has had its beginning here, in all our life's labor, care and relationship to one another; the existence beyond this is only the finished constellation of the glory which is commenced here, an advanced stage of its development. We are not so blind and dumb that we cannot comprehend the difference between the household where the words of righteousness are uttered, where examples of purity are set, and that household where such noble examples are not seen. Would you see your children around the throne of God? Would you see them clad in glory and crowned with immortality and eternal lives? Then teach them truth while they prattle around your knee; learn them to lisp the truth, teach them to love it ere they can fully know its worth, and as they grow in capacity to reason and understand they will then bless the father and mother that taught them truth and purity, and to hate and despise the wrong and choose the good. Truth will regulate all life's details; I care not how numerous they may be, all will yield to the saving, sanctifying, hallowed influence and supreme love of truth. When we teach the truth to our children, it is one of the best proofs that we love the truth ourselves with all our minds, might, and strength. If we take this course we shall see the kingdom of God growing; its outward embellishments will appear, its wealth will increase and its power will spread abroad on the right hand and on the left until untold millions of earth's children will repose in security, safety, and happiness, and be blessed beneath its banner. Then, its temples will rise in beauty, grandeur, and glory, and the home of every Saint will become a temple where God will delight to reveal the richness of his blessings to his faithful children. If our God shines as the perfection of beauty out of Zion, Zion must reflect that beauty; it must have an existence in Zion reflecting its beauty outwardly upon the world around. The glory of Zion must be created by the children of Zion. We cannot attain to this all in a moment. We first begin to make our homes tidy and to subdue every enemy to our peace, that we may have more comfort. If we wish our children to have an exalted taste for the lovely and beautiful, create something lovely for them to look upon, let them behold a practical example and exhibition of the beautiful and lovely when they are at home; when they go into the garden let them see the development of beauty, and when they come to maturity and remove far away they will think of the paternal home with delight and pleasure as the place where peace reigns, where joy is developed, where the odor of sweet flowers are inhaled by the visitors, greeting our early rising or cheering us when we retire to our rest. This is the picture of the home of a Saint, of him who loves to beautify Zion and exalt the children of Zion above all other people on the earth.

It does not follow of necessity that the poor man must possess broad acres. If your garden is no larger than this stand, cultivate it properly, plant fruit trees and other useful plants, and rivet the attention of your growing family to the contemplation of their duty; let them see an example in you from day to day and from year to year which

will exercise a salutary influence upon the minds of your children throughout their future lives. If I have not myself been able hitherto to make such a home, it is the home that lives in my mind. I show you the ladder over which you may travel from any condition of degradation and ignorance to all that is noble, exalted, and Godlike. We must start from where we are, and we shall soon see better houses, more fruitful and lovely gardens; the residences of the Saints will grow into beauty and the cities of the Saints into magnificence.

The Prophet Joseph once took me by the arm in the street, and said, "I have so many blessings, and there is nothing but what you can enjoy in your time and place the same as I do, and so can every man." But I have prayed this prayer, "If the bestowal of wealth upon thy servant, O Lord, will make him a fool and cause him to forsake the truth, may I remain poor until I can bear it." We might as well complain that we were not all born at the same time as to complain of any disparity that may exist between us in pecuniary matters. Let the Saints who have just come to these valleys from their fatherland learn to be contented in whatsoever position they are placed in, that is, when you are in circumstances that neither you nor your friends can change for the better. To complain of circumstances that cannot at the present be improved would simply be a waste of your time, and your time is precious, for we are not going to live many years according to the common course of things to improve ourselves here. It will be to our advantage to live in this world as long as we can improve, and the longer we live here and improve, the stronger grow the ties that bind us to this existence. I want to see the kingdom of God grow from this small beginning that is right around us, until the whole earth is filled and blessed with its glory as it now blesses and fills the valleys of Deseret in a degree. We are connected with an enterprise that is great, noble, and honorable, with an enterprise that is not satisfied with a limited acquisition, with a small victory over sin, but it is an enterprise that grasps the world's emancipation from sin, darkness, and death; it looks at no smaller object than the world's freedom from sin and its consequences.

Being connected with so great an enterprise, I do not feel any more that I am a worm of the earth, but that I am associated with the Gods of eternity, and that angels are my kindred and of my family. This is the way I want the Saints to feel. If they feel this way they will shun all wickedness, and seek for right and try to do it all the time. I for one am engaged in the great work of building up the kingdom of God upon the earth, and I want to get the Saints to see the value of that practical purity of life that will utterly destroy the power of sin, purge out the transgressor from our assemblies and render us more and more acceptable to God all the time, because better calculated to bless the world.

God bless you: Amen.