

Men Powerless Except as God Permits—Ordeals Necessary to Purify—Zion Will Triumph

Discourse by President John Taylor, delivered at Grantsville, Sunday Evening, Oct. 29th, 1882.

I am pleased to have the opportunity of again meeting with the people of Grantsville.

In regard to the remarks which we have just heard pertaining to the desires and intentions of the wicked they are true and correct; but at the same time I do not feel any trembling in my knees, do you? It has been said, the wicked rage, and the people imagine a vain thing; and the Lord will have them in derision. Again, the Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. There are other remarkable and significant sayings in relation to these things; and whatever the opinions and ideas of men may be, it will be found at last that the Lord rules, manipulates and manages the affairs of men, of nations and of the world, and therefore, neither this nation nor any other nation can do anything more than God permits. He sets up one nation, and puts down another, according to the counsels of his own will. And he has done this from the beginning, whether men believe it or not. And as regards what are called the mighty ones—the kings of the earth—one of the prophets in speaking of them says that he saw them gathered together in a pit; and that after many days they should be visited. All men are but human; their breath is in their nostrils, and they have no power but that which God gives them. Anything beyond this they are powerless to do; and why, then, should His people fear? We certainly have a work to perform on the earth, and God our Father has selected us for that purpose. He raised up Joseph Smith and other men, and conferred the holy Priesthood upon them and today they are found organized as Elders, High Priests, Seventies, the Twelve, etc., by whom the Lord expects to lift up a standard to the nations, and an ensign to the people. And notwithstanding the calculations and plans of the world, we are told that when this standard is lifted up, the Gentiles shall seek unto it, “and his rest shall be glorious.” That is the way I read my Bible: I expect you will find it in yours. We are not going to war. We did not originate this work any more than men originated any work in which God called them to labor, at any former time. God has been the chief mover and manipulator of men in the different ages of the world from the time of their first existence upon the earth to the present. He has given men their own agency, and they have the privilege of receiving or rejecting it, but he holds them responsible for their acts. He does not hold us responsible for the acts of other men, nor for the acts of the nations.

He has given unto us a mission to preach the Gospel to every creature; and he that believes shall be saved, and he that believes not shall be damned. He has given unto us authority and has commanded us to preach this Gospel to the nations of the earth; and we have been doing it now for some fifty years, and are constantly sending out missionaries by way of fulfilling this duty. We have done this and are still doing it, not because the world love us very much; if they did, it would be a marvel, for Jesus in his day said: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” And there has been a spirit of opposition and antagonism to the Church and kingdom of God in all the various ages of the world. Paul speaks of men who had to wander about in sheepskins and goatskins, secreting themselves in deserts, in dens and caves of the earth; of whom the world was not worthy. Said he, these men showed plainly by their acts that they desired a better country; “wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city” which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens for them. Such men had a knowledge of these things, and they did not seem to care very much about the consequences of their obedience to the laws of God.

The three Hebrew children exemplified their faith in God when they were told to do a certain thing; but, said they, we cannot do it. “But if you do not we will put you into a fiery furnace.” All right; it is not a very pleasant ordeal to go through, but one thing we know, we will not bow down to your image, nor worship the god which you have set up. And that is a fact in regard to us. We do not know what God will permit men to do or what he will not; but one thing we do know, that is, we will not worship their god nor bow down to their image; and we feel quite easy about the result—at least, that is the way I feel. It was considered criminal for Daniel to pray to his God, but he prayed nevertheless; and the Lord was merciful to him and took care of him. The king felt a little better towards him than

some of our pious people feel towards us. He was called a heathen king; but he was a man that had the fear of God in his heart, and he had respect for his fellow men. And when Daniel was cast into the lions' den, in the morning early the king repaired to the place, and with a lamentable voice cried, saying, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God whom thou servest continually able to deliver thee from the lions?" Daniel answered: "O king, live forever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouth, that they have not hurt me." I do not know, but I am inclined to think that if some of you Latter-day Saints had the same ordeal to pass through, that few, if any of the authorities of the land would feel as much interested in you as the heathen king did in Daniel.

It is necessary that we pass through certain ordeals in order that we may be purified. People sometimes do not comprehend these things; they think it would be very nice to do as the Methodists sing about sometimes—sit and sing themselves away to everlasting bliss. And where is that? Somewhere they say beyond the bounds of time and space. I have never come across a person that was able to locate that place; and it is one of those things I never could comprehend. But they did not all do this in former times. When no other power operated against them Satan himself undertook to interfere; and I sometimes think that he has done that very thing in our day. Job, for instance, was a curious sort of a character. It is said that on a certain occasion the sons of God met together, and that Satan also presented himself before them—rather a strange personage to meet with the sons of God. I think sometimes that we have exhibitions of that here. And on that occasion, as usual, he was full of accusations; you know he always has represented the saints of God as the meanest set of people that ever lived, and he is up to his old tricks today; but then, we are told that he was a liar from the beginning. When he went before the Lord—I suppose he had been complaining to Him of the people down below, for he is called the accuser of the brethren—said the Lord to him: Lucifer, hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil? And Satan answered the Lord: Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast not thou put a hedge about him, and increased his substance, and blessed the work of his hands—as much as to say: "I, too, would serve the Lord, if he would treat me as well as Job has been treated; but let me have a rap at him and I will show you then what he will do." And the Lord gave him permission to afflict Job, but charged him that he was not to take his life; and the devil did afflict him, as you all know. But in all that he did he found that Job was true to his God, and that the confidence he reposed in him was not misplaced. Not discouraged, however, the devil appeared again before the sons of God, and the Lord took occasion to remind him that Job "holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movest me against him, to destroy him without cause." And Satan answered the Lord, and said, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." The Lord then permitted the devil to afflict his body, which he did; and on the back of that he got Job's friends to come and visit him, and comfort him—you have heard of "Job's comforters"—and they did "comfort" him? They would have him believe that all his misfortunes and sufferings were because of his wickedness, and the judgments of God were overtaking him, and then to crown the climax his wife comes along and says, Job, I would not stand it any longer; I would curse God and die like a man. But, says Job, thou speakest like one of the foolish women. What, shall we receive good at the hands of the Lord, and not evil. And notwithstanding all that was brought upon him, he said, Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him, for I know that my Redeemer liveth; and that He will stand in the latter day upon the earth, and that although worms may wallow in my flesh, and revel in my brain, yet, in my flesh shall I see God, these eyes shall behold him, and I shall see him for myself and not for another. Job had faith in his God, and he delivered him; and in his latter days he gave him more children and more property than he had ever possessed before.

Again, we read of certain people, described in the visions of John, who were clothed in white raiment, singing a song that no man knew or could sing excepting those that were acquainted with the principles that they were. And who were they? They were those that had come up through much tribulation, who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. And are we not told that we must be made perfect through suffering? Are we not told, that "it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering?" I think that is the doctrine that we have read in our Bible; and that is the doctrine that I have always believed in. There are many of our good Latter-day Saints who are grasping and covetous and who take advantage of one another, and who frequently act dishonorably and who say things that are improper and wrong, and that are contrary to the principles of justice and equity; and sometimes it is necessary that men should be shook up a little. God in His wisdom has handled us from

time to time. I can see men around me tonight whom I have seen and known for forty years—do you remember, brethren, when we had to leave the State of Missouri, “all hands and the cook?” And did we cry about it? I think not. I felt as happy then as I do now, and I feel quite comfortable tonight. I feel that all is well in Zion. As long as people have within them the principles of eternal life; as long as they have within them the hope that blooms with immortality and eternal life, what do they care about what is happening or going to happen; what do they care what this nation can do or is going to do. They can only do what God permits them.

We have learned many things through suffering, we call it suffering; I call it a school of experience, I never did bother my head much about these things; I do not today. What are these things for? Why is it that good men should be tried? Why is it, in fact, that we should have a devil? Why did not the Lord kill him long ago? Because he could not do without him. He needed the devil and a great many of those who do his bidding just to keep men straight, that we may learn to place our dependence upon God, and trust in Him, and to observe his laws and keep his commandments. When he destroyed the inhabitants of the antediluvian world, he suffered a descendant of Cain to come through the flood in order that he might be properly represented upon the earth. And Satan keeps busy all the time, and he will until he is bound; and I expect they will then have good times until he is loose again. The time will be when he will be cast into the bottomless pit, and he will not be able to deceive the nations any more until the thousand years have expired. I have never looked at these things in any other light than trials for the purpose of purifying the Saints of God, that they may be, as the Scriptures say, as gold that has been seven times purified by the fire.

The Lord has gathered us from the nations of the earth and has given to us His Holy Spirit. He has organized His Church, and He has conferred upon us all the rights and privileges of the Holy Gospel. He has taught us how to save ourselves, and how to save our wives and children, and how to save the living and how to save the dead. He has taught us how to be saviors upon Mount Zion, and he has taught us that the kingdom is the Lord's; He has taught us that we are operating for him and his kingdom in the interests of humanity; for he is desirous to gather out from the nations all the pure, the virtuous and the noble, men and women who will observe his laws and keep his commandments.

Again, he has given unto us eternal covenants, as referred to this evening, which also are true and have emanated from Him. Can we violate the principles of eternal life? No, never. We have got to put our trust in God, let the consequences be as they may. And as long as we do this, and as long as we keep the holy covenants we have entered into with him and with one another, Zion will triumph; and the wicked will waste away until there will be no place found for them; and the man or the nation that lifts up his hand against Zion will wither before Almighty God. I will prophesy that in the name of Jesus Christ, and I will meet the consequences of what I say. But I will tell you what we have to do, my brethren and sisters, we must fear God in our hearts; we must lay aside our covetousness and our waywardness, our self-will and foolishness of every kind. As brethren, we must humble ourselves before the Lord, repenting of our sins, and henceforth preserve our bodies and spirits pure, that we may be fit receptacles for the Spirit of the living God, and be guided by him in all our labors both for the living and the dead. Our desires must be for God and his righteousness, until we shall exclaim with one of old: O God, search me, and try me, and if there be any way of wickedness in me, bid it depart. It is for us, as fathers and mothers, to go before the Lord in all humility and call upon him that his peace may be in our hearts; and wherein we may have done wrong, confess that wrong and repair it as far as we possibly can; and in this way let every man and woman in Israel begin to set their houses in order, and forever cultivate the spirit of peace, the spirit of union and love. And if the families of Israel do this throughout all the land of Zion, all fearing God and working righteousness, cherishing the spirit of humility and meekness, and putting our trust in him, there is no power in existence that can injure us; for God will stand by and sustain his people, and he will deliver them out of the hands of their enemies. And as for the world I will say again, and as I have said on other occasions, I care not what they may say or what they may do; the wicked, whether men or nations can do no more than our Father in heaven permits them to do, and so long as we are doing that which is right before him, why should we fear—are we not in his hands, and is not the whole world in his hands, and can he not do with us and with them as seemeth him good?

Brethren and sisters, God bless you, and may his peace continue with you, in the name of Jesus. Amen.