The Gospel—It Brings Temporal As Well As Spiritual Salvation—The Prophet Joseph Smith—Persecution—Our Religion Cannot Be Destroyed

Discourse by Apostle Lorenzo Snow, delivered in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City.

In addressing an assembly of Saints I expect the benefit of their prayers, without the ceremony of asking; being assured they are aware, as well as I am, that our teachings and administrations in the Gospel of life are blest according to our faith and prayers, and the diligence and patience we bestow.

I propose to make some general observations upon the Gospel and its administrations, and in relation to its effects when received, and the important blessings derived by this community, through its divine power and virtue. This Gospel, which God has commanded us to offer to the world, is an order or system of things, simple, plain, and may easily be understood. In regard to its principles, the nature of its requirements, and the precise kind and character of its blessings and promises, no one, however ignorant or unlearned, needs to be left in the dark; but may discover its golden truths, and the emblazoned mark of divinity in its arrangements as distinctly and as speedily as Naaman, the captain of the Assyrian host, found divine virtue and the hand of Divinity in the order prescribed to him by Elijah, through which his leprosy was removed. In his case, the order of obtaining a miraculous blessing, viz: to immerse seven times in Jordan, as prescribed by Elijah, was so simple, so plain, and in regard to its divine efficacy so easy of ascertainment, that the great captain at first, was exceedingly wrathy at the idea that God should propose to work upon him through such easy and simple forms; but the order through which he could be healed of his leprosy was prescribed of God, through the Prophet, and finally the Assyrian officer, through the plain, commonsense reasoning of his servant, concluded to waive his objections and comply with the requirements; and having done so received the promised blessing.

The first principles of the Gospel which we offer, and which put men in possession of the revelations of God, and a knowledge of this work, are precisely as simple, plain, and as easy of understanding as the order before alluded to, through which the heavens were opened to Naaman.

The Gospel was brought to our respective locations, far remote from these mountain vales. It found us citizens of various nations, speaking our respective languages, each possessing his peculiar notions and prejudices, with his associations, and a strong attachment to kindred, friends and country. However unpleasant, unkind, unjust, and inconsistent it might appear at first, we clearly foresaw that in receiving the Gospel we should be compelled to break off those associations, and sever those attachments, leaving the lands of our nativity, and go forth with our wives and our children to a distant land of which we had but little knowledge. Yet, a similar requisition was made upon the House of Israel, in the land of Egypt; also upon Noah and his family, and upon Abraham, and the family of Lot in the city of Sodom, and upon the families of Lehi and Ishmael, as mentioned in the Book of Mormon.

But, in the provisions of the Gospel which was offered to us, there were fairness and safety; it proposed to give, through obedience to its requirements, a perfect knowledge of its divine authenticity; so that, in leaving our kindred, breaking up our social relations, and going forth from our native lands, we should first become perfectly assured that it was no human contrivance—something gotten up to effect a political purpose or satisfy some worldly ambition, or to achieve some private end through human cunning or craftiness.

The Gospel was plain and simple in its requirements, and there could be no mistaking the precise nature of its blessings and promises, nor the manner and time in which they were to be secured.

The first feature, in this system, which struck us with surprise and arrested our attention, was its perfect similarity, in all its parts, with the Gospel as recorded in the New Testament. It required repentance, and a forsaking of sins, immersion in water for the remission of sins, with a promise that, through the laying on of hands by those having authority, people should receive the Holy Ghost, by which the knowledge would be obtained of the truth of the doctrine. Another remarkable feature, which called into exercise our most serious consideration, was the solemn

testimony of the Elders, that they possessed the right to administer these sacred ordinances, by virtue of the Holy Priesthood committed to Joseph Smith, through the ministration of the Apostles, Peter, James and John. And furthermore, that this solemn and most important fact should be revealed to every man, upon his faithful obedience to the Gospel requirements.

In these propositions, though at first seemingly strange, we saw that everything was plain, fair and honorable. In doing what they required, we should only do, in fact, what, as true-hearted believers in the ancient Gospel, we ought to do; and if we failed to receive the promised blessing, and thereby proved the Elders' testimony false, our religious condition would, nevertheless, be *then* as good as other Christians, and a little better, perhaps, because we should have approached a little nearer to the doctrine of the Scriptures, so far as their true forms and ceremonies were concerned. Of course, in this case, having proven to our satisfaction, that there was no Holy Ghost, no supernatural manifestations, no knowledge, no revelations accompanying the Elders' administrations of the Gospel; no human persuasion, no cunning sophistry could have induced us to leave our homes and friends to embark in a scheme which our common sense taught us would eventuate in bitter disappointment and inevitable ruin; but, like other Christians, we should have continued in the enjoyment of friends and home, still groping our way through religious darkness, expecting nothing, hoping nothing, and receiving nothing.

But the fact that I am now speaking to assembled thousands of intelligent and enlightened people, who received this Gospel with the aforementioned fond considerations and lively expectations, gathered here by their own free will and choice, out of almost every nation, demonstrates most clearly, most forcibly and most solemnly, that this system of life, this Gospel as proclaimed by Joseph Smith, has been made known to us by the revelations of the Almighty—that it is undeniably His will, His word and His message: not only this, but we find within ourselves a fixed purpose, an unalterable resolution to do, if need be, what many of us have already done, viz: show the sincerity of our convictions of these solemn truths, through sacrificing all we possess—not even holding ourselves so dear to us as this religion.

There was yet another prominent feature embraced in this order of things, viz: where it found the people in poverty, misery, in a condition but a little above starvation; it spoke in positive terms of future relief, and effectual deliverance. It did not simply say: "Be ye warmed, and be ye clothed," but it declared plainly, and in distinct terms, that the Lord had seen their bondage and oppression, and heard their cries of sorrow and affliction, and now had sent His Gospel for their deliverance, and would lead them into circumstances of independence. There, again, was something consistent, and worthy of admiration, and characteristic of our Great Parent, discoverable in all His dispensations, when in actual working order, as they were in the case of Noah, and in the calling of Israel, making them an independent people; likewise in calling Lehi to establish a people upon this continent, as well as in many other instances.

A religious system is of but little account when it possesses no virtue nor power to better the condition of people, spiritually, intellectually, morally and physically. Enoch's order of the Gospel, did for his people all this, and it has done the same in every instance when preached in its purity, and obeyed in sincerity. Many thousands of the persons in these beautiful valleys, who formerly were compelled, with their wives and children, to subsist in a half-starved condition—not owning a habitation, or a foot of land, a horse, a cow, pig or chicken—nothing they could call their own; subject at any moment, through the whim of their employer, to be turned into the streets, miserable beggars; now own cabinet shops, factories, mills, flocks and herds, beautiful gardens and orchards, and productive farms, wagons and carriages, dwelling in their own houses, in comfortable and easy circumstances. No one has any apprehension of starvation within the jurisdiction of the Latter-day Saints.

The Gospel proposed these blessings at its announcement, and they have been most miraculously accomplished. No other religious system could have achieved such things, nor dared any other Christian denomination venture to send out its missionaries "without purse or scrip," and without a college education, to declare to the people that they had authority from God to administer the sacred ordinances of the Gospel, through which should be revealed tangible evidence and knowledge of its divinity and of their authority to administer it; and to take people from a state of poverty, and lead them thousands of miles, and, despite every obstacle, establish them a comparatively independent people in the midst of a wild, desert country. Had they found them poor, friendless, without the

means of living, and in servitude little better than Egyptian bondage, as we found many of them; they would have imparted no cheering news of an approaching salvation from the God of heaven; but could only have exhorted them to be contented and reconciled with their unhappy lot, and in no case must they look for any new revelation, or miraculous interposition.

What philanthropists have wished to accomplish, and often attempted, the Lord is now doing on a magnificent scale in this American Desert. Flourishing settlements, towns and cities have sprung into existence, extending over a distance of five hundred miles in length, and hundreds of miles in width, through the untiring energy and perseverance of a people, formerly totally ignorant of such labors. In these cities people live in harmony; and poorhouses, grog shops, gambling hells, houses of ill fame and prostitution are not known in any of our numerous towns and cities, except in some instances, where Christians (so-called), possess a footing and influence.

No one, however prejudiced he may be, can scarcely avoid acknowledging the palpable fact, that this system has conferred miraculous blessings upon thousands and tens of thousands, in the way of putting them in possession of the means for sustaining themselves, after having delivered them from oppression and tyranny, little better than African slavery; and, no doubt, our legislators at Washington, one and all, would give us credit for our indefatigable and successful labors, in establishing an extensive and flourishing colony, on a portion of our Government domain, formerly inhabited by savages and wild beasts; provided we would admit this work to be the work of man, and not of God—that it had been accomplished through the artifice and wisdom of man, and not by the power, wisdom and revelations of God.

Joseph Smith, whom God chose to establish this work, was poor and uneducated, and belonged to no popular denomination of Christians. He was a mere boy, honest, full of integrity, unacquainted with the trickery, cunning and sophistry employed by politicians and religious hypocrites, to accomplish their ends. Like Moses of old, he felt incompetent and unqualified for the task, to stand forth as a religious reformer, in a position the most unpopular—to battle against opinions and creeds which have stood for ages having the sanction and support of men, the most profound in theological lore; but God had called him to deliver the poor and honest-hearted of all nations from their spiritual and temporal thralldom. And God promised him that whosoever should receive and obey His message—be baptized for the remission of sins, with honesty of purpose—might receive divine manifestations, should receive the Holy Ghost, the same Gospel blessings which were promised and obtained through the Gospel, when preached by the ancient apostles. And this message, this promise, was to be in force wherever and to whomsoever it should be carried by the Elders, God's authorized messengers. So said, Joseph Smith, the uneducated, the unsophisticated, the plain, simple, honest boy.

It is through the virtue and force of this boy's statement, that I speak this afternoon, to assembled thousands.

In the integrity of my heart, with honesty of purpose to know the truth, I received this message—I obeyed this form of doctrine and I received, in the most tangible and satisfactory manner, a divine manifestation—the promised blessing—a knowledge of this work. Am I the only witness? How is it with the experience of thousands whom I now address? Are you also witnesses? If you are not, I ask you in the name of common sense, why are you here? Why did you leave your homes and country, giving your sanction to the truth of a system which promised you divine manifestations, but which you failed in experiencing? Being honest ourselves, if we cannot bear a truthful testimony of having received divine manifestations that God, Himself, has founded this order of things, then it becomes a serious fact, that we are witnesses, and in truth the only proper witnesses, that this whole plan and pretention of Joseph Smith is a sheer falsehood, a miserable fabrication.

It will be recollected that this Gospel message proposed to give us divine manifestations through our doing certain specified acts; we have performed those acts in precisely the manner indicated. None but ourselves have attempted to conform to this arrangement; consequently, no other people are prepared to be witnesses either for or against this system. * * * * *

When the Gospel, or order of things which we have received, was presented to us, we carefully compared it with the Gospel recorded in the Scriptures, and found it alike in every particular, as regards its forms, ordinances, and

the authority to administer them; its promise of the Holy Ghost, and the signs that should follow, together with the promise of a knowledge of its divine origin. In many instances it was brought to us by men with whose character we were familiar, and for whose honesty and integrity we could vouch, who solemnly stated that, through an obedience to its requirements, they had obtained a knowledge of its heaven-born principles.

This was my experience, and after having complied with its demands, and thereupon received a knowledge of its genuineness, and having obtained authority to preach and administer its ordinances, I commenced forthwith to proclaim it to the world; and undoubtedly there are persons in this congregation, out of different nations, to whom I have administered this Gospel, who can witness to its virtue and efficacy. Many years I have been engaged in forwarding the interests of this order of things, and you are the proper judges whether it be of God or of man.

We have the same Gospel the primitive churches had, and the like knowledge and evidence they had of its divine authority; and we have just as brave and honest Elders to preach it; men who have proven their integrity through sacrifice as great as the Elders of the primitive churches ever made. The testimony of our Elders is as valid and worthy of credit as the testimony of their Elders. Our present Apostles are as honest as the Apostles of the New Testament, and our testimony is as worthy of credit, so far as we live and speak according to the Scriptural law and testimony. If this order of things which we have obeyed is not the Gospel—if these evidences, these manifestations, this knowledge, this Holy Ghost, these deliverances from misery and bondage, and being placed in comfortable and happy circumstances, living together in peace and harmony, building beautiful towns and cities, free from demoralizing institutions, be not the legitimate fruits of the working of the pure and holy system established by God, through Joseph Smith, we shall be compelled to question the genuineness of the Gospel of the former-day Saints, as recorded in the New Testament.

By some, it has been argued, that Joseph Smith and the prominent Elders were the most corrupt, wicked and infamous of impostors, but his followers, the Latter-day Saints, in general, though deceived, were very good people, and scrupulously honest in their religious opinions.

From what I have already said in regard to the operations and effects of this work, it may readily be seen that, if it be an imposition, it is not confined exclusively to the leaders of this people, but this whole community are actively, and knowingly engaged in a stupendous scheme of deception and hypocrisy; and, by the way, as I before hinted, if this could be proven to be the case, we should be driven to the belief that the former-day Saints, also, had been engaged in the same disgraceful imposition.

More than one hundred thousand people now dwell in these valleys, many of them having come from distant climes and nations. In this great fact they willingly and understandingly exhibit to the world a powerful testimony more expressive than any language could command, that they did, undeniably and positively receive, through the ordinances of this Gospel, administered unto them by our Elders, a knowledge of this work, through divine manifestations.

But it may be objected that, whereas, members of our community were found by our missionaries in great poverty and distress, therefore, they obeyed the Gospel and migrated here, to better their circumstances financially, without regard to its truth or falsity as a divine system. Although this might be true in isolated instances, it is *impossible* as regards its application to our people as a community. Those persons who received this work without religious motives, and without an honest conviction of its divine requirements, but solely for the “loaves and fishes” cannot possibly abide the test to which everyone’s faith, sooner or later, must be brought, but will have his dishonesty and hypocrisy exposed, and will sooner or later apostatize.

Hundreds of our Elders, full of Godly zeal, animated with the purest motives, having obtained a knowledge of the will of God, have left their wives and children, whatever the heart holds most dear, and gone forth to the nations without worldly compensation, calling on all to repent and turn their hearts to the Lord—obey the Gospel, with a promise that they should receive the Holy Ghost, which would “lead unto all truth and show things to come,” and would be their guide and monitor—a principle of revelation, remaining with them through life, inasmuch as they preserved their honesty and integrity, continuing faithful in keeping the commandments of God, and devoting their

time, their means, their talents, their all in building up the Kingdom of God. These duties were required, these blessings promised by our Elders in the preaching of the Gospel. To obtain light—a knowledge of the will of God, to secure the true religion—divine manifestations regarding the truth of the doctrine as taught by Joseph Smith, was the first, and all-absorbing proposition presented to the people.

Now, whether these Elders and missionaries were base impostors, promulgating sheer falsehoods, or not, is of course a question of grave consideration; yet it is a matter of far greater importance, and of more serious inquiry, whether our people, as a community, having failed to receive those divine testimonies, keep silent as to that most vital and important question, and come here to practice fraud and deception in religion, and thus fasten irresistibly upon the minds of our children and future generations a system of falsehoods, for a divine religion.

Joseph Smith affirmed that Peter, James and John visited him, and conferred on him authority to administer the holy ordinances of the Gospel through which every honest-hearted man and woman was promised the Holy Ghost, and a perfect knowledge of the doctrine.

I had been a member of this Church but a short time when I obtained, by a divine manifestation, a clear, explicit and tangible demonstration of the truth of this work. Thousands and tens of thousands of Latter-day Saints, men and women, in private life, can testify to the same experience; and though I may know many principles in regard to this doctrine, which in their limited experience, they may not understand, yet in that *one fact*, they are equal to me in knowledge, equal to the messengers who have administered to them this Gospel.

I now wish to examine another prominent feature of our religion. An important item which was prominently held forth wherever this Gospel was proclaimed, was, that its followers should have an abundance of persecutions, and probably, in the progress of this new life, be compelled to suffer the most trying sacrifices, as wife, children, houses and lands, despoiling of goods, and perhaps even, of life itself. No persons are properly prepared to enter upon this new life, until they have formed, within themselves, a fixed resolution to abide this ordeal.

The Savior, the Apostles, Joseph Smith, and the Latter-day Elders, when offering this system to the people, told them clearly and em– phatically, that it required sacrifices of the most serious character—that it would bring persecutions, change our warmest friends into bitter and relentless enemies, and that instances would occur when the world in the confused ideas of right and wrong, would even conceive they were doing God's service in taking our lives. These were dark and forbidding prospects to a rational person in allowing himself to be proselyted to a system whose truths he could not know, but only guess at by what he was told, or of which he had read. Every man and every woman, before receiving a system that called for such sacrifices, would require a positive assurance that submission to its requirements would bring indisputable knowledge of its true divinity, so that, after having obtained a divine witness of its genuineness, they could willingly, cheerfully and with a resolution, inspired by the Almighty, move forward along the pathway of persecution and sacrifice, traversed in all ages by martyred Saints and Prophets.

On this point permit me again to quote what Jesus promised, viz: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And upon this *rock* I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Peter had obtained a *revelation* which Jesus called a *Rock*, which every man might receive individually for himself to build upon, with perfect assurance and safety—on which he could anchor his hopes and prospects of salvation. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, promised the Holy Ghost to those who would repent and receive baptism. That principle imparts the knowledge or the *rock* of *revelation* upon which the Savior declared His people should be established; and we constitute the only religious community which dares assume this Scriptural position; and our realization of the Savior's promise, "that hell shall not prevail against" a people thus established, affords us peace, tranquility, unshaken confidence, and a cheering and happy assurance of security in the midst of all kinds of threatened ruin and overthrow. It is the people, the masses—not exclusively their leaders, who possess this knowledge, and boldly testify to its possession.

The astronomer may know of many laws and phenomena relating to the sun and its movements through ethereal space; but as regards the simple fact that it exists, and shines upon the earth, millions know as well as himself.

President Brigham Young and even Joseph Smith, so far as respects the fact, that this Gospel which we preach as a divine institution, never professed to have a knowledge more convincing and satisfactory than tens of thousands in these valleys who never arose to address a public audience.

This system of religion, in its nature, in the character of its origin, the manner of its operations, and in the purposes for which it was designed, coupled with the fact, that people of honest hearts, can and will appreciate divine truth, is such that it cannot be destroyed. A man who is honest, full of integrity and love for the interest and happiness of mankind, having explored this long untrodden path, and made this glorious discovery, will not and cannot keep silent, but despite of threats and opposition, however fierce and terrific, will boldly declare the glorious fact, spreading and multiplying this divine intelligence, and if so required, seal this testimony with his own life’s blood.