

The Priesthood Ancient and Modern—God's Dealings With the Children of Men in Every Age—Final Triumph of His Kingdom

Remarks by Elder Wilford Woodruff, Tabernacle, G.S.L. City, October 22, 1865.

There is a great responsibility resting upon any prophet, apostle, high priest, elder, or any messenger or servant of God, who is called to preach the Gospel; and any person who is called to preach the Gospel to the children of men is entirely dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord for all the principles he may present unto those who hear him. Any generation, also, to whom a message is sent from heaven, is held responsible for the receiving or rejecting of that message.

It is a very hard matter for the Lord to build up His kingdom upon the earth, where the devil has power and dominion over the minds of the children of men. It would be impossible for Him to do so in this or any other age of the world, unless he found an element to work with Him, for the very reason that He has given to all men an agency to choose the path in which they will walk. This is the reason why there has been so small a portion of time since the creation of the world in which God has had an organized kingdom upon the earth—when He has had a church that He Himself has organized, guided, dictated, directed and controlled. The devil—Lucifer—the son of the morning, has had great dominion here upon the earth; he has had great dominion over the minds of the children of men; and the Lord has taken great pains, I may say from the creation, to endeavor to establish His kingdom, to present His laws upon this earth, and to get the children of men to obey those laws that they might fulfil the object of their creation.

The Lord gave father Adam the priesthood, and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, after the fall. When he went out into the dreary world, driven from the Garden of Eden, he received the Gospel, he received the priesthood, and he started forth upon the face of the earth with the keys of the kingdom of God, to endeavor to establish the works of righteousness upon the earth. He gave this priesthood to his sons. A number of them were ordained high priests. But in the commencement we find not only the work of God but the work of the devil manifest in the hearts of men. Cain was stirred up in anger against his brother Abel, and rose up and slew him, shedding innocent blood, and the power of evil commenced in the beginning. We find from the Bible, as well as from other revelations which God has given us, that Adam and the early patriarchs, those who were willing to be led by the law of God in that generation, received the high priesthood, and lived to a great age. It is said Methuselah lived to be almost 1,000 years old, and so did father Adam and others. They held the priesthood, and taught their children truth and righteousness to establish the kingdom of God in their day and generation. Herein is where I say the Lord commenced and labored to establish his kingdom and to guide men to receive the word of the Lord, that they might walk in obedience to His laws, fulfil the object of their creation and be saved when they got through with this probation—that they might keep their estate and receive an exaltation and glory in the presence of God.

We are informed by revelation that Adam, three years previous to his death, “called Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, and Methuselah, who were all high priests, with the residue of his posterity who were righteous, into the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman,” and there bestowed upon them his last patriarchal blessing; and he prophesied what should take place even till the coming of Messiah, which prophecy is said to be written in the Book of Enoch. But men soon began to work corruption and unrighteousness on the earth in that early age; and in tracing the history of the church and kingdom of God from those prophets down, we find that the majority of the human family were unwilling to keep the commandments of God or to live according to those principles which were revealed to them for their salvation. It was but a little time after, comparatively speaking, that Enoch, who was acquainted with the teachings of Adam and of his fathers who held the holy priesthood, labored to gather the people together to practice righteousness, but the majority of them would not be guided by him. He labored 365 years, we are informed by revelation, teaching them principles of righteousness, that they might become sanctified and prepared to receive celestial glory, but his labors were not appreciated by them. Why did not Enoch remain on the earth and Zion prevail? Because wickedness prevailed. The majority of the human family in that generation were wicked; they were not ruled over by the Lord; and, hence, there were not men enough on the face of the earth, in that generation, who were willing to receive the Gospel, keep the commandments of God, and work the

works of righteousness, for Enoch to have power to remain on the earth. Therefore it was that the Lord took Enoch and the city of Enoch to himself; for we are informed by revelation that the city was translated and all its inhabitants. There were not men enough in the days of Enoch who were willing to sustain that which was right; one part or other had to leave the earth; and the Lord translated Enoch and his city and took them home to Himself.

You may trace the history of the kingdom of God from that time down, and you will find this prevailing among the nations of the earth. They were prone to evil, to sin, to blasphemy, to lie, to steal, to swear, to commit adultery, to pollute the earth which they inherited, in their day and generation, and hence it was an impossibility for the Lord to establish His kingdom among the children of men, unless He could find willing minds enough to receive that kingdom, to build it up and sustain it and do the works of righteousness. The devil did not make this earth. It never belonged to him, and never will; but Lucifer was cast down to the earth with the third part of the hosts of heaven, and they have dwelt here until today. They remain here yet; and they have had their effect upon the hearts and minds and lives of the children of men for nearly six thousand years—from the time that man was cast out of the Garden of Eden into the cold and dreary world.

The Lord has set His hand many times in different dispensations to establish His kingdom upon the earth, He has raised up men—noble spirits—who have come forth and tabernacled in the flesh at different periods and times. He has inspired those men; given them revelations; filled them with inspiration, with light, with truth, with the things of the kingdom of God; and many of them had the vision of their minds opened to behold the fate of the work of God in all generations—the beginning, the middle and the end. Many old prophets have seen, by revelation, our day, have seen the sorrow, calamity, war, and afflictions in various dispensations and ages of the world. The earth had become so corrupted under its inhabitants in the days of Noah, that the word of the Lord came to him to build an ark; he received revelation from God to prepare to save himself and his family, while the wicked were destroyed. Enoch before him had seen this event; he had seen the same things as Noah. The Lord had shown him what was in the future. Whenever a generation have corrupted themselves and defiled the earth, and the cup of their iniquity is full, the Lord has brought judgments upon that generation. This we have ample testimony of from the commencement of the world.

Noah was 120 years building the ark, we are informed in the Scriptures, and during that time he preached the Gospel. How many who were willing to believe his testimony? Only eight souls in all, including himself. He was very unpopular, I presume, and had as much derision heaped upon his head, for building an ark on dry ground, as any man that ever lived on the earth. But Noah was a prophet and a messenger of God, called to warn that generation and to build an ark, and if he had not done it he would have been held responsible for the lives of himself and family and all that generation. But he had the Spirit of God and was willing to do as he was told, whether the doctrine he preached was popular or unpopular. He built the ark, and went into it with his family, and they were saved. The history of the flood and of the salvation of Noah and his family is well known. He performed the work assigned him to do, and was saved; and that generation went to hell, there to remain until Christ went and preached the Gospel to their spirits in prison that they might be judged like men in the flesh. So you may trace the history of the kingdom of God through the world, generation after generation, and there is no generation that we have ever read of, the majority of whom have been willing to serve the Lord.

Look at the days of Abraham, whose faith was so great that he was called the father of the faithful. He was an heir to the royal priesthood, another noble spirit, the friend of God. He came upon this earth, not in a way of light, but through idolatrous parents. His father was an idolater. I do not know who his grandfather was; but his father had false gods that he worshipped and sacrificed to. God inspired Abraham, and his eyes were opened so that he saw and understood something of the dealings of the Lord with the children of men. He understood that there was a God in heaven, a living and true God, and that no man should worship any other God but Him. These were the feelings of Abraham, and he taught his father's house, and all around him, as far as he had the privilege. The consequence was, his father and the idolatrous priests of that day sought to take his life. In the book of Abraham, translated in our day and generation, we are informed that Abraham was bound, and those priests sought to take his life, but the Lord delivered him from them. One reason why they did so was, that he had gone into those places which his father considered sacred, and among the wooden gods which were there, and, being filled with anger

that his father should bow down and worship gods of wood and stone, he broke them. When his father saw that his son Abraham had broken his gods he was very angry with him. But Abraham, trying to reason with his father, said that probably the gods had got to fighting among themselves and had killed one another. He tried to bring him to reason, but his father did not believe they had life enough to kill one another. If he had possessed the spirit which his son had, he would have said there is no power with these gods; but he did not, and Abraham had to flee from his father's house, confiding in the Lord, who gave many promises to him and concerning his posterity.

We have no account of the Lord having organized a kingdom upon the earth in that day; but he gave the priesthood to Abraham, who taught his children the principles of righteousness. Isaac taught Jacob; and Jacob's sons, the twelve Patriarchs, were taught by the priesthood, and God gave unto them many great and glorious blessings. From that time until the days of Moses we can trace in sacred history that the Lord had witnesses on the earth, from time to time, who were raised up and bore record of the truth to the people. Moses was raised up and led Israel forty years, he was a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, and received his priesthood from Jethro, his father-in-law, who received it through Abraham. Moses undertook to preach the Gospel to the Israelites; but they were very dark, very prone to evil, as well as the Gentiles around them; and they had not that faith and the fulness of inspiration which the Lord desired, to build up his kingdom; consequently, they had a law of carnal commandments given to them to bring them to Christ. The Lord labored with them, and Moses labored with them; he could not leave them for a short time but they were ready to turn to idolatry and make a golden calf to worship, or something contrary to the kingdom of God.

Trace this down to the days of Christ and you will find it has been a hard matter for the Lord to get people to have faith in Him to build up His kingdom. Jesus came in fulfillment of the prophecies; He was the Son of God, and a literal descendant of Abraham. He came to his own and his own received him not, though he was the Son of God. Take the Jews today anywhere in the world, and they do not believe in Jesus. I do not say this because I wish to find fault with them. I have a great love for them as a people. But they have rejected the Messiah, and they will remain in unbelief until they go back and rebuild Jerusalem—which they will do in this generation—and until the Messiah comes. The day will come when Judah will know who Shiloh is, and that day is not very far distant. Jesus came, organized his church and kingdom and sent the Gospel to the Jews; but the Jews failed, through unbelief, and the Gospel was given to the Gentiles, to whom one of the ancient apostles said, "If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not you." Did the kingdom of God remain in the days of Christ, with apostles, pastors, teachers, and the gift of the Holy Spirit? But a little time elapsed until the Lord could not find men enough throughout the whole Gentile world who would receive the kingdom of God in its purity, embrace its principles and maintain it on the earth. Hence there was a falling away; the gifts and graces of the Gospel were lost to men; those who held the priesthood were overpowered, and put to death by wicked men. The Church went into the wilderness, and all that the prophets had spoken concerning the kingdom of God in that day had its fulfillment.

Christendom professes to believe the Bible; and all we have asked of this generation is to believe the Bible, and then they will believe that God will establish his kingdom in the last days, for the Bible plainly points it out, and shows that the Lord will send an angel bearing the everlasting Gospel, to them that dwell on the earth, that it may be preached to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. All the prophets who have spoken of the last days have spoken of this work. Daniel saw it and prophesied of it. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the prophets have referred to it. And the Lord sent his angel, in fulfillment of what he declared he would do, who called upon a man on the earth, a literal descendant of Abraham and of Joseph—one of the promised seed who had been prophesied of in ages past and gone, that he would come forth and lay the foundation of the kingdom of God. The angels of God ministered unto him; his name was Joseph Smith; and he laid the foundation of this kingdom, or this congregation would not be before me today. You are the fruits of the labors he commenced.

The Lord has said that in the last days his kingdom should not be taken from the earth, nor given to another people; but that the kingdoms of this world should become the kingdoms of our God and his Christ. We have the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the book of Doctrine and Covenants, and other revelations of God to this effect. Either this is the kingdom of God or it is not the kingdom of God. If it is not the kingdom of God, then are we like the rest of mankind; our faith is vain, our works are vain, and we are in the same condition of ignorance with regard to the

Gospel and the purposes of God, as the rest of the world. There are tens of thousands throughout these valleys, who know that this is the kingdom of God. They know this by the revelations of Jesus Christ. It is not the testimony of another man that gives me the knowledge for myself. If I had not the testimony of truth for myself I would not be qualified to build up this kingdom. There is no man or woman qualified to build up the kingdom of God if they have not the testimony of truth for themselves.

I will say to this congregation, Jew and Gentile, believer and unbeliever, that this is the great kingdom spoken of by Daniel, the commencement of the Zion of our God, which every prophet has spoken of who has referred to the Zion of the last days. The Lord has sworn by himself, because he could swear by no greater, that he will establish it in the latter days. But to do this he must get a people to work with him. It could not be done otherwise if the world stood for a million years, for it is by the agency which men hold that he accomplishes his purposes on the earth. The Lord prepared the way for this age and generation, and he has raised up some of the noblest spirits in this dispensation that ever dwelt in the flesh. He ordained Joseph Smith from before the foundation of the world, to come forth and lay the foundation of his kingdom. Those that knew Joseph know that he was true and faithful unto death. He labored, after he was ordained with Oliver Cowdery, fourteen years, two months and twenty-one days, in the establishment of this work, after he organized the first branch, with six members on the 6th day of April, 1830. He was martyred on the 27th June, 1844. What did he accomplish, raised up, as he was, in the midst of a generation as full of tradition as the inhabitants of the earth were in the days of Noah, and almost as unbelieving as that generation were? He had to combat the errors of our forefathers which had been handed down for generations. He built upon the same foundation that Jesus and the Apostles built upon. He preached the same Gospel accompanied by the same ordinances that they preached. He organized the Church in the same way, with the same gifts and blessings, and the same Spirit accompanied the Gospel to those who believed. The elders went forth calling upon the children of men to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, and have hands laid upon them that they might receive the Holy Ghost. And the testimony was, that if they obeyed the Gospel they would receive that Spirit. Did the Lord sustain that testimony by giving the Holy Ghost from the heavens? He did, as every faithful man and woman in this Church knows and can bear testimony to before God, angels and men. This was a great work. He lived until he sent the Gospel to the nations of the earth; he built temples, gave endowments to the Twelve and others, and told them that they must bear off this kingdom. He accomplished all that the Lord required of him, and he sealed his testimony with his blood; and his testimony is in force today. Had Joseph Smith shrunk from the duty which God required of him; had he said, "It is unpopular, I will not make as much by preaching the Gospel as if I were to let it alone, I will only be persecuted," the consequence would have been he would have been damned. The Lord would have taken the priesthood from him, and held him responsible for the testimony he had given him. We are all in this position. If we do not do our duty and bear a faithful testimony to this generation, the Lord will hold us responsible. This generation, who have shed the blood of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum and others of the anointed of God, are held responsible for so doing before high heaven, and the judgments of God will follow them for shedding innocent blood.

But did the kingdom stop when the prophets were put to death? No, for it is the kingdom of God. It fell to the lot of brother Brigham Young to receive the priesthood and hold the keys of the kingdom. You who have been acquainted with him for the past thirty years, know his life. You know what he has accomplished. I have traveled many thousands of miles with him, and have been familiar with his labors. No man ever lived in the flesh who traveled more miles to carry salvation to the children of men, who preached more and did more for the redemption of mankind and to carry out the purposes of God, during thirty years, than he has done and is doing. The Lord has sustained him, for he is going to cut his work short in righteousness. He is determined to build up his kingdom as he has promised. Did you ever see an elder refuse when called upon to go on a mission to preach the Gospel? Hardly one in five thousand. This is because they are true and faithful unto God. The Spirit of God is in them. The Lord has planted that Spirit in them that they might go and work to build up this kingdom.

The world feel today concerning "Mormonism" and this people as they did in the days of Noah and Lot concerning the revelations of God and those who believed them then. But what of it? The unbelief of men does not make the work of God of no effect. The Lord requires faithfulness at our hands; and if we do not do our duty we will be held responsible before high heaven for the use we make of the holy priesthood which has been bestowed upon us.

While I sat and gazed, last Conference, upon the vast assembly of elders who were here in this Tabernacle, I thought of the words of Isaiah, when his mind was opened and he looked in vision upon the future. Said he, "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted." What do you see, Isaiah, that should cause you to break forth in such language as this? I see what the Gods of eternity see. I see what all the prophets and patriarchs before me have seen—that the Lord Almighty will build up his Zion upon the earth in great power and glory in the latter days. Yes, "But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me. Thy children shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee." Elder Woodruff quoted from the 13th to the 26th verse of Isaiah, 49th chap.; the 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8 verses of the 52nd chap.; and the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 13, 14, 15, and 22 verses of the 60th chap.

Thus chapter after chapter he goes on to declare that Zion's strength is in the Lord Almighty; and his strength is with her because of her faithfulness and integrity. If the elders of Israel had the vision of their minds opened to see Zion in her beauty and glory, they would have no time to sin or do evil; but they would rise up in the strength of the Lord God of Israel and accomplish all that he requires at their hands. Zion is yet in her weakness, but the little one shall become thousands, and the small one a great nation. We talk of the future and of the promises of God to us. They are worthy to be talked of, worthy to be lived for, and to rejoice over, because they are true.

We have warned our own and other nations; and so far our garments are clear of the blood of this generation. There never were men in the flesh who labored harder and tried more to fulfil the commandments of God than the elders of this Church have done. Some of our elders have traveled over 100,000 miles in thirty years to preach the Gospel and build up the kingdom of God; and the Lord Almighty has labored with us.

I have an anxiety—a strong desire, to see the people of the Latter-day Saints—the inhabitants of Zion, rise up and put on their strength. I desire to see them increase in the knowledge of the truth, in faith and good works, and in the knowledge of the things of the kingdom of God. The Lord is not pleased with wickedness and sin. Let any man look at our own beloved country. There is more crime now committed in ten years in it, than used to be in a century. Will the Lord bear with this? No, he will not. He has already destroyed two great and powerful nations that dwelt on this continent, and the remnants of another are scattered over the country in the miserable few who bear the marks of the curse of God upon them—the Indians. If men shed innocent blood, do wickedly, and work iniquity, the seed that they sow they must reap the harvest of.

If the Latter-day Saints, to whom the Lord has revealed the light and truth of the Gospel, were to prove unfaithful and rebel against God, they would be cursed below any people on the earth, below even these miserable Lamanites that we see wandering around our settlements; for we know more than they or their fathers knew; we know better what the mind and will of God is. It is that knowledge that has sustained us for the last thirty years, and over. We know this is the kingdom of God; that we are the friends of God; that the kingdom will stand; and woe be to that nation, kindred, tongue, or people, to that individual or family under the whole heaven that lifts a hand against the Lord's anointed or against the friends of God, for they will feel the chastening hand of God. We wish this generation well, and we have labored hard to try and save them. Whether men believe or disbelieve is nothing to us; it is our business to keep the commandments of God. If we live so as to keep the Spirit of God with us we will have power to do good and to carry out the things which he requires at our hands.

Be true and faithful; do your duty to yourselves, to your country, to your God, and to one another. When we do this we shall overcome and inherit eternal lives. May God grant that we may do so for Christ's sake. Amen.