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Of the First Council of Seventy

“After all that has been said, the greatest and most important duty is to preach the gospel.”

That was said by the prophet of the new dispensation in a council meeting of the priesthood in Kirtland on the 6th day of April, 1837. It was a meeting of the Apostles and a number of other brethren holding the priesthood, at which the Prophet had been speaking and setting in order the quorums of the priesthood and teaching them its doctrine, also straightening out some difficulties that had arisen in some of the quorums. He dwelt at great length upon these doctrines of the priesthood. He spoke on that occasion for nearly two hours, part of the time in severe reproof of some of the actions of the brethren, and then afterwards in setting forth great doctrines pertaining to the priesthood, he uttered the words I have just read:

“After all that has been said, the most important duty is to preach the gospel.”

The trend of thought in the several meetings we have held in this conference has been largely in the direction of giving encouragement and admonition to go on in the work of preaching the gospel, that has been restored in this great and new dispensation of it. And so this passage came to my mind from the history of the Church, and I have asked myself several times during the conference if there has been any change in respect to this matter mentioned by the prophet. Is it still true that “after all that has been said the most important thing is the preaching of the gospel”?

In a number of the early revelations that were given in the Church about the time of its organization and the publication of the Book of Mormon, there is answer given to a number of personal questions, to brethren who had rendered some assistance to the Prophet in bringing forth the Book of Mormon. They saw his preparations being made for the organization of the Church, and they began to wonder what their relationship to the forthcoming work would be, what it would mean to them. The Prophet's brother, Hyrum, came making such inquiry; so did Joseph Knight, the grandfather of our “Uncle Jesse Knight,” as we knew him here in our pleasant relations with him. The Prophet's father came to know what would be his lot and part in the forthcoming of the great work, and the Prophet by means of the Urim and Thummim, which he still had in his possession, made inquiry and told them what would be their lot and part; and there is this singular thing in all the answers that were given at that time through the divine instrument of revelation, through the inspired Prophet, that there was no promise made of material welfare and prosperity, no office promised to them, no honor among men, nothing that the heart of man naturally craves. The type of the answers in those several revelations, and there are some eight or ten of them, was the one given to Oliver Cowdery. The Lord said to him in the

revelation given unto him as to what he should do in the new dispensation :

“Many times you have desired of me to know that which would be of the most worth unto you.

“Behold, blessed are you for this thing, and for speaking my words which I have given you according to my commandments.

“And now, behold, I say unto you, that the thing which shall be of most worth unto you is to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father. Amen.”

It was the Lord Jesus Christ speaking.

Again to David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery conjointly this was said :

“Remember, the worth of souls is great in the sight of God,

“For behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him.

* * * * *

“And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!

“Wherefore, you are called to cry repentance unto this people.

“And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!”

I take it that there has been no change in these principles; that it still holds good that great is the joy of the Lord in the soul that is brought to repentance: that it is still true that if one should labor his whole life and succeed in bringing only one soul to a knowledge of the truth and into the kingdom of God, great will be his joy in the kingdom of our Father; and that it is still true that the most important work in which man can engage is to declare repentance unto this people, that the ministry of this Church may bring souls unto God. Therefore, it is eminently fitting in this conference that our brethren should be inspired to emphasize this work of “preaching the gospel,” and what the Prophet said in 1837 is still true, that “after all that has been said the most important thing is the preaching of the gospel.”

The strength and power of our Church and the progress it has made in the world and the great things that have been accomplished by it have been in due proportion to our adherence to this missionary spirit that prompts us so willingly to preach the gospel.

Preaching the gospel is the dissemination of God’s revealed truths, the messages of God, to the world. In the nature of the thing itself there could be no more important thing than to impart knowledge and wisdom of God unto the children of men, that it may save them to the uttermost. What could be more important than spreading abroad a knowledge of those enlightening truths which God has sent into the world through his appointed and inspired prophets? And I think I may say, for I feel it to be true, that in all the responsibilities and labors that have been placed upon the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, our people have not been more faithful in anything than they have been in this thing of preaching the gospel. I think the Lord is

well pleased with his people for the responses they have made to this call of his to send forth his messages of truth into the world, and I am delighted to see that the Church has responded also to the great spirit of the message that was to be delivered to the earth in the hour of God's judgment. St. John describes it as he saw it in vision when he declared that he had seen "another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to every nation, kindred, tongue and people, saying," and saying it with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to him for the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who created heaven and earth, and the seas, and the fountains of water."

It was God's call to the world to come to the worship of the true and the living God, and it was to go to all people. And it was particularized so that there should be no mistake—it was to go to "every nation and kindred and tongue and people"; and the Church has responded to that splendid universal spirit and mission given to our Church in having the gospel restored to it. We have been practically to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. I have marveled sometimes in my own heart that we should remember the undeveloped peoples in the islands of the sea, even in the early decades of our history; that we should remember people with whose race and with whose national life we have little in sympathy. Yet, under the inspiration that goes with this work of preaching the gospel, the elders of the Church have been sent everywhere, and almost every land and race and nation has given up of its sons and daughters to be gathered to Zion to stand as witnesses unto God and to the world, that there is virtue and spiritual power in this gospel that has been restored in these days; and that it has taken hold of the splendid spirit of the fatherhood for the human race; and by our universal proclamation of the gospel we have borne witness to the world that God is interested in all humanity, that he is no respecter of persons. In that spirit the Church has labored.

I rejoice greatly in the report of President Grant in regard to the building program of the Church, by which in very many of the missions, almost in all of them, there have been churches erected to the name of the Most High God. I have a thought in relation to that work which came to me while we were dedicating some of the chapels which were builded in the Eastern States Mission while I was its president; and we never dedicated a church, however humble it was, but what I felt and said, that here we were erecting an altar, not unto the unknown God, but to the known Father of the human race, the God of heaven, whose Son Jesus Christ is. And all through the land where we build these chapels we are erecting altars to the known God, to which the people may come and find the truth and be instructed therein. I rejoice in every chapel that is builded, another altar to the known God, a center to which the people may come and receive the truth. In this spirit we are erecting these chapels as altars to God in the midst of the people. The Savior said that the kingdom of heaven was like unto leaven that the woman hid in three measures of meal until the whole

was leavened, filled with life. And so in this blessed land of ours, the land of Zion, these chapels, meeting places, these temples, are so many altars unto God, calling the inhabitants of the earth to the worship of the true and the living God. For it is the plain implication in the vision of St. John on Patmos that the whole world had departed from the worship of the true God and must needs be called back to the worship of the true and living God.

Whenever I pass this temple, walk alongside of it and contemplate its towers, its architectural beauty—of course I remember primarily that it is the House of the Lord wherein the sacred mysteries of heaven are revealed for the instruction of men, and holy ordinances for the living and for the dead are performed—but I hold it as sacred in my heart as I look upon it; and I have another thought in connection with it, and that is that it is a mass testimony of a whole people, a testimony to the world that God has spoken, and that he has revealed his truths once more for the salvation of men and has ushered in the dispensation of the fulness of times. It is a mass—a community testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and becomes a witness wherever even the counterfeit presentment of its architectural beauty is published to the world. I love the temple as a testimony to the world of God's great new dispensation of his gospel, and the other temples also partake of the same glory and power and spirit.

Now, I am taking too much time on these things. There is something else I wanted to say, and it is this: We have been abundantly admonished in this conference to give attention to the preaching of the gospel and to the living of its principles; but I am emphasizing the matter of preaching it to the world. Since, however, we are so admonished in this our latest conference to regard this part of the work of the Lord, what is necessary on our part to get imbued with this spirit of preaching the gospel?

In the early decades of the Church there were existing conditions that contributed mightily to the spiritual life and upholding of the zeal and hopes of the people, but things that are not so prevalent now in our midst. For example, in the first years of the existence of the Church, the fact that we were proclaiming that God had spoken again, that a new revelation had been given—the truth of that was immediately challenged. Ministers of the gospel set themselves to work to prove that the volume of scripture was completed and forever closed, and, therefore, there was no room for the Book of Mormon, and there was no occasion for the revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith. The awful voice of prophecy had ceased. There were to be no more prophets. The volume of scripture was completed and forever closed. Well, we won that victory. It was not difficult to do so. The evidence of the scriptures and the genius of the gospel of Jesus Christ itself demanded a continual revelation if the spiritual life of the Church was to be maintained; and so our early elders obtained an easy victory over those who assailed us on that point. But the thought of a new revelation was a novel one; it attracted the attention of the world; it

became a center of interest. We were witnesses of it. Well, I say that battle was easily won, and we hear little today of objection against the idea that God's power is just as great in modern times as in ancient times, and there are very few who will undertake to disprove the possibility or even the probability of continuous revelation.

Also in those early decades we had in our minds the idea of finding and establishing Zion, and afterward, through the revelations of God, we found where the center place would be and could bear witness of that; and some of the saints from the East gathered into Jackson County and founded the city of Zion, where a temple was to be built, the plans of which were revealed to the Prophet. Then came on persecution and expulsion from Jackson County.

Then the great point of interest for a number of years was "the redemption of Zion" and the re-establishment of the saints upon their lands and the building of the city and the temple. Well, that does not now play so important a part in the message we have for the world in the preaching of the gospel.

Also we had revealed to us the doctrine, the great doctrine, of consecration of all our possessions and the receiving back of a stewardship from our consecrations. We had a desire to see the wealth that should be created by the hands of the people more justly distributed, so that there would be less distinction of rich and poor in the Church, and that there might be a community of interests and a community of resources from which the welfare of the people could be provided. That occupied our attention for a number of years. But we are not saying so much about that now. It is in the background of things, a part of the new dispensation, just as the redemption of Zion is. But what I wish to say is that these several things are not at present what you would call live issues with us. We are not giving much attention to those things now.

Again in the early decades of the Church the people were led to believe almost in the immediate coming, the glorious coming, of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and great glory, and that the time was near at hand. Indeed there were many who fixed upon about the time when he would come. Well, we still believe in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we do not very often refer to it in these days, and it is not so particularly influencing our actions and our faith as it did in times past. The Lord will come when he will come, and that he will come we are assured. The time of it is in his hands, where we feel that we can safely let it rest. Indeed, we must needs leave it there because it is part of the revelation of God unto the world that no man knoweth the day nor the hour of his coming, no, not even the angels in heaven. So I say we leave that in the hands of God.

Also we looked in those times past to a rather wonderful and dramatic gathering of the Ten Tribes of Israel, with mountains of ice flowing down before their presence and their coming in great numbers, with the everlasting hills trembling at their presence, and all that. Perhaps we have not always attributed sufficient importance to the imagery

of poetry and revelation in giving interpretation to these scenes. Well, the Ten Tribes of Israel, if they are to come in that manner, will come when they will, and the Lord will bring them.

But now, what is the situation that confronts us in the matter of preaching the gospel? Why, we are reaching more fundamental things than these. We have discovered from the remarks of the brethren in this conference that the world is ignorant of the nature of God the Father, ignorant of the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. Few Christians believe that the resurrected Redeemer is today what he was at the time of his resurrection, a union of spirit with his beautiful personality of body, and the two united in an immortal, indestructible, forever-living Son of God. They believe rather that the splendid personality—splendid as it is represented in the New Testament to be—had been dissolved into some indefinable essence, such as the rose, as it decays, dissolves and gives off a beautiful perfume with which it dies, and which to produce it must needs die. And so the Son of God has become an indefinable presence, merely; while the splendid personality which stood before his apostles when he gloriously said as a resurrected personage: “All power is given to me in heaven and earth. Go now and preach the gospel to every nation, and lo, I am with you to the end of the world,” for many Christians has passed out of tangible existence, and God has become a diffused essence through the world. Well, they don’t know the truth about God and Jesus Christ, whom to know is declared to be life eternal.

We have heard from some of the brethren here and have read that men do not know and may not hope to know the purposes of God in creation. Men confess that they do not know whether the resurrection is to bring to pass personal immortality or whether men, too, are going to pass off into something like an essence, or be dispelled into ordinary elements of some kind or other about which they know little or nothing.

These great fundamental truths in relation to God and man and the resurrection from the dead; and “how we shall spend eternity,” and “what we shall do there”—they are ignorant of these things. And so the Lord God, early in the history of this new dispensation, told his ministers, (years before the Prophet announced that the most important thing was to preach the gospel) what it would be necessary for them to do in order to be prepared to preach the gospel. The Lord said to them:

“I give unto you a commandment—”

These were elders waiting for the time to go out into the mission field—

“I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.

“Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand;

“Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things

which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms."

And now, why invite this group of elders into this very extended field of knowledge and admonish them to be faithful in their studies in all these things that go back into the past, that deal with the present, which extend into the future, a knowledge of kingdoms and governments and countries and laws of men, things in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, which embrace all possible fields of knowledge? Why did God give this admonition to these elders? Listen to the answer :

"That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling wheretunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you.

"Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who has been warned to warn his neighbor."

And also in that sermon of the Prophet's wherein he told the elders that the greatest thing was to preach the gospel. "All," said he, "are to preach the gospel by the power and influence of the Holy Ghost." "None can preach the gospel without the Holy Ghost."

So now, there is our work of preparation set before us, and that is the immediate duty and work of the priesthood of God, to make preparation, to constitute yourselves an intelligent ministry, operating and testifying in the power of the Holy Ghost. The Lord bless you. Amen.

A vocal solo, "Lord, remember me," was sung by Arnold Blackner.

The congregation then sang "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

Elder James Duckworth, President of the Blackfoot stake, offered the closing prayer.

Conference adjourned until 10 a. m. Sunday, October 7, 1928.