

ELDER JOHN A. WIDTSOE

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

My dear brethren and sisters: I rejoice in being again in attendance at one of our great General Conferences. They are refreshing periods to all of us who believe in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A TRIBUTE TO PRESIDENT GRANT

We regret that President Grant is not here. But we all rejoice to know that he is improving in health. I want to say that President Grant is not only the President of the Church, and our leader in that sense, but that the prophetic mantle of this day rests upon him. He is a prophet of God, and we shall do well to follow his example, listen to his teachings, and be worthy of his blessings. During the years that I have been permitted to labor among the General Authorities of the Church I have had the privilege on many occasions to witness the prophetic power that accompanies President Grant, and I bear testimony today, solemnly and soberly, that he is a prophet of the living God.

A STANDARD TO THE WORLD

In thinking about this Conference my mind has wandered rather far and wide. Probably the thought that has come to me most often has been as to the place and purpose of the Church in this war-torn world, this world of strife and unhappiness. What is our mission to the world? I have turned to the scriptures to get the answer, and have found the answer, both in ancient and modern scriptures. It is that the Church of Christ at all times must be as a standard to the nations, a standard to which all nations, all people, all men may turn as they seek safety, peace, and happiness.

It is our great mission, brethren and sisters, to be a standard to all the world, and we say without hesitation that those who obey and comply with that standard will find that which men most desire in life. It is a bold declaration, tremendously bold, that a small people in the valleys of these mountains, misunderstood, often harassed by persecution, may become the standard by which all mankind may be led to peace and happiness; but so it is. I am not saying it. It is the word of the Lord, both in ancient and modern days. If this standard would be accepted by the world the things we pray and hope for would soon come.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Let me say that the Church of itself cannot be this standard. Since the Church is made up of individuals, it becomes an individual responsibility to make the Church a standard for the nations. I must be a standard in my life. I must so conduct myself that I may be a standard worthy of being followed by those who seek the greater joy in life.

The question as to individual responsibility for the welfare of the Church was asked in the early days by members of the Church. Several of the men who labored with the Prophet Joseph Smith came to him in those early days and said: "What shall we do?" They might have said: "What shall we do to be saved?" The Lord in every instance gave an answer. We have a series of short revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, which are the answers to that question. I find in every one a significant statement, worded almost identically in all of these revelations, to Hyrum Smith, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and others of less fame in the Church: "Keep my commandments, and seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion." That is our business, the business of the Latter-day Saints.

From one point of view, it is selfish enough, perhaps, to keep the commandments that I may be blessed, but it is something even greater to keep the commandments that Zion may be established. As the foundation of His great cause the Lord gave the law of sacrifice. Unless we give of ourselves we cannot build Zion, or anything else worthy of the great cause that the Lord has given us. The law of sacrifice, from the day of Adam to the present day, in one form or another, is the basic principle of life among the communities of Saints.

So we need, in this Church and Kingdom, for our own and the world's welfare a group of men and women in their individual lives who shall be as a light to the nations, and really standards for the world to follow. Such a people must be different from the world as it now is. There is no opportunity for Latter-day Saints to say we shall be as the world is, unless the world has the same aim that we have. We are here to build Zion to Almighty God, for the blessing of all the world. In that aim we are unique and different from all other peoples. We must respect that obligation, and not be afraid of it. We cannot walk as other men, or talk as other men, or do as other men, for we have a different destiny, obligation, and responsibility placed upon us, and we must fit ourselves for that great destiny and obligation.

JESUS' PRAYER FOR HIS DISCIPLES

I remember the wonderful prayer offered by the Savior in Gethsemane just before His crucifixion, when He talked to His Father—perhaps the most sublime prayer known to us—in which He said: "I pray not that thou shouldst take them"—He spake of His disciples—"out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from evil. They are not of the world."

Just now, perhaps, as never before, we need to remember that this Church and Kingdom, and the members thereof are not to be out of the world, but they must not be of the world. There is a vast difference between those two conditions—the difference between light and darkness. We are a peculiar people and ever shall be and ever must be a peculiar people.

Let us remember the obligation that rests upon the Latter-day Saints to build Zion. It is not so difficult to carry out, for the Lord is our helper, and He will be with us and assist us and instruct us and make us able to do the work that lies before us, if only we have a sincere desire to be the Lord's helpers.

Let us remember one of the best known statements in our Latter-day scripture—the Book of Mormon—in which Nephi's faith is evidenced by this statement: "For I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which He commandeth them."

We must be unique, separate in ideals from most of the world. We have the greatest mission in all the world. But let us not be afraid. The Lord has called us to His Kingdom and His service. He will make it possible for us to do the work He would like us to do.

THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD HAVE SPIRITUAL MEANING

That brings me to the final thought that has been moving through my mind the last few days, that all these things, all the commandments, all the wonderful statistics that were read this forenoon, which made us grateful, all the achievements of the Church, have great spiritual significance. We of the Kingdom of God cannot walk merely on earth; we must walk in heaven as we walk on earth.

The Lord has told us so in modern revelation, in another well-known and much-loved message to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created.

At no time has God given His children a commandment which does not have a spiritual significance. Often I fear we fail in our obedience, because we look upon God's commandments with temporal eyes, and fail to understand their spiritual meaning. Let me call your attention to three or four commandments which have a deep spiritual meaning.

THE WORD OF WISDOM HELPS IN SELF-MASTERY

The Word of Wisdom is one of the best known of all the laws given to His people in these latter days. It was given in the year 1833, and has been preached by every President and leader of the Church. Every father and mother should be preaching and teaching the Word of Wisdom—a protection to the body against ill health. The observance of the Word of Wisdom does give us sound bodies, lengthens out our lives here on earth, gives us clear minds, wisdom and understanding; but it has even a greater meaning than that, a spiritual meaning. For if I am able to observe the Word of Wisdom, refrain from the things forbidden in the Word of Wisdom, do the

things there advised, I thereby become master of my appetites. I can look my appetites, as it were, in the face, and say: "Get thee behind me." I am master, not subject to an appetite. The cigarette is not my master, I am the master. This glass of liquor is not my master, I am the master. Can the Lord build Zion, can He establish the cause of Zion, can He make us a standard for all the nations to follow unless we are masters of ourselves? If we are but slaves to an appetite, what can the Lord do with us? Great as He is the work shall fail.

TITHING IN A SPIRITUAL SENSE

Take another law that has been talked about several times here today, the law of tithing. It has built meeting houses, sent men and women on missions, maintained our Temples, and the many activities that President Clark reported in his stirring address this morning. The spiritual value of tithing is that if I obey the law of tithing sincerely I separate myself from the love of earthly things, and become strong enough to love the things of heaven better than the things of earth. No man can rise very high who lives by earthly things alone. The things of earth drag us down unless spiritually made alive. I must look upon things of the earth merely as helps in my temporal life, no more than that.

I believe that until mankind is able to divorce itself from its love of earthly things we shall not be able to build God's kingdom or be a standard for the nations to follow.

Another principle spoken of here today—missionary work—has a distinct spiritual equivalent. In it lies a spiritual principle. I create and develop within myself, when I give of my time and means and talents to the preaching of the Gospel a love for my fellow men, brotherly love. God is love. Without love we can do nothing in the building of His Kingdom.

WORK FOR THE DEAD DEVELOPS SPIRITUALITY

And fourth and last—although many might be dealt with in this fashion—is the work that will be celebrated here tonight in the Tabernacle. One hundred years ago the first baptisms for the dead were performed. Since then we have done a tremendous amount of work for the dead. We have built Temples and spent time and money in gathering genealogies. We spend days and days in the Temples serving the dead. The spiritual principle back of that activity is the development of a more perfect love, a more complete unselfishness. It is well enough to preach to those who are living. They may become my friends and neighbors, my helpers, I may see the fruits of my labors, but it is quite different to spend my strength and time and money for those long since dead, who are to me only names. By giving myself in the spirit of true helpfulness to those that have gone before me, I develop within myself, within my heart and soul, an abounding love very near to that of God Himself. Then the sel-

fishness of the world fades away, and upon the conquest of selfishness hinges all human welfare.

ZION TO BE BUILT BY OVERCOMING SELFISHNESS

I want to call the attention of the Latter-day Saints to the fact that there are always two sides to Gospel principles, the one pertaining to this earth for our guide and help here, and the other dealing with the eternal spiritual realities, the eternal principles of the Gospel by which men touch the unseen world. What a standard to all the world we would be if we all were masters of ourselves, of our appetites, if we could set aside earthly joys for spiritual welfare! If we really loved our fellowmen, if we were really impelled by unselfishness in all that we do, then we would be a standard to the nations, the power of the Lord would be ours, and Zion would be built through our efforts.

God bless us in all that we do in behalf of this great work. I bear testimony to the truth of the restored Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, its prophetic power and service, from Joseph Smith to our present leader, and I do it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

ELDER RULON S. WELLS

Of the First Council of the Seventy

All the days of my life—and they are now many—I have been brought up under the influence of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My heart is full of gratitude that I have a membership in this Church. I remember from my very youth many of the testimonies that have come to me by reason of that membership. Many, many times has the Lord manifested unto me the truth of His everlasting Gospel as it has been restored to the earth through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, in the day and age in which we live.

A TESTIMONY AT AN EARLY AGE

It was only, very likely, a few days or weeks after my baptism, which occurred shortly after I was eight years of age, that I received a testimony. I did not then know definitely just what it was; I hardly appreciated what it meant, but the Lord manifested to me the truth of this work in my boyhood. I recollect very well a remarkable incident which occurred as I was coming home from school one day (the school being located across the street eastward from the present location of the West High School, in the building then known as the Union Academy, under the tutorship of Doctor Doremus), returning by my usual route up North Temple Street, then known as Jordan Street, on the south bank of City Creek, which was a winding, deep canyon stream going down Jordan Street until