

broadcasts, presents two devotional programs each Sunday. Today, the network service of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints comes to you from the Mormon Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, where the 115th semi-annual conference of the church is now in session. The speaker will be Elder Ezra T. Benson, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church. He speaks today on the subject: *America, A Choice Land*. The Salt Lake Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of J. Spencer Cornwall, provides the music for the service. Dr. Frank W. Asper is at the organ. The choir opens with a chorus from the St. Paul by Mendelssohn, using the text from scripture: "How Lovely Are the Messengers That Preach Us the Gospel of Peace."

Choir sang, "How Lovely Are the Messengers"—Mendelssohn.

Announcer: We now give the service into the hands of Elder Ezra T. Benson, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

ELDER EZRA TAFT BENSON

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

To the peoples who should inhabit this blessed land of the Americas, the Western Hemisphere, an ancient prophet uttered this significant promise and solemn warning:

Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, . . . For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. (Book of Mormon, Ether 2:10 and 12.)

AMERICA FOUNDED ON CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES

Founded on the truth of Christian principles, this nation has become the world's greatest power. Whence have come our blessings of influence and success, and what assurance do we have that these blessings may be continued? Have they not come as a result of a humble and devout recognition of the overruling power of Almighty God in the establishment of this nation, and the willingness of the founding fathers to conform their actions to divine law?

Our earliest American fathers came here with a common objective—freedom of worship and liberty of conscience. The Pilgrim Fathers, the Puritans in New England, the Quakers in Pennsylvania, the Catholics in Maryland, the Lutherans in Georgia, and the Huguenots in Virginia, all came seeking God and the enjoyment of God-given, self-evident rights based on eternal principles. Familiar with the sacred scriptures, they believed that liberty is a gift of heaven. To them, man as a child of God, emphasized the sacredness of the individual and the interest of a kind

Providence in the affairs of men and nations. They acknowledged their dependence upon God as they exhibited their humble faith in, and devotion to, Christian principles.

Those who later became the leaders and founders humbly recognized the need for, and actuality of, divine guidance. They saw clearly the importance of vital religion and morality in the affairs of men and nations. The following are a few quotations from their sincere statements. George Washington said:

No people can be found to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency.

Then as to the place of religion and morality, the Father of our country continues:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports, . . . Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

Daniel Webster with prophetic vision declared:

If we and our posterity shall be true to the Christian religion, and if we and they shall live always in the fear of God, and shall respect his commandments, . . . we may have the highest hopes of the future fortunes of our country.

However, he pointed out that if we fail so to do then,

No man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us that shall bury all our glory in profound obscurity.

These are solemn words but fully as sobering are the words of Abraham Lincoln uttered many years later as follows:

God rules this world, . . . I am a full believer that God knows what he wants a man to do—that which pleases him. It is never well with that man who heeds it not, . . . Without the assistance of that Divine Being, I cannot succeed, with that assistance I cannot fail.

And then regarding our duty to God, Lincoln warns:

It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow . . . and to recognize the sublime truth that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

Yes, the early leaders and the people generally of this great nation recognized the necessity for spiritual support if the nation was to endure. They gave humble expression to this conviction in the inscription, "In God We Trust" found on the coins of the land. The holy Sabbath was a day of rest and worship. Religious devotion in the home was a common practice. Family prayer, reading of the holy scriptures, and the singing of hymns were an every-

day occurrence. There is every evidence that "our fathers looked to God for their direction."

In framing that great document which Gladstone declared "the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man," our early leaders called upon a kind Providence. Later the product of the constitutional convention was referred to as our God-inspired Constitution. They had incorporated within its sacred paragraphs eternal principles supported by the holy scriptures with which they were familiar. It was established "for the rights and protection of all flesh according to just and holy principles." Later the Lord himself declared, "I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose."

Founded as a great Christian nation our forebears have bequeathed to us an incomparable inheritance as a sacred trust. As Americans, are we worthy of these rich blessings? Are our lives such that we feel assured of the future security of this great nation? Well might we remember that a continuation of all these glorious promises is conditional.

MATERIAL PROGRESS EVIDENT

And what can we say of our material progress? Travel across this great land and note its broad fruitful farms, its humming factories and gleaming cities; its schools, churches, recreational areas, and its rich natural resources. Remarkable advances have been made in providing an ever-increasing array of conveniences, comforts, and beauties for man. Today the average standard of living of our citizens exceeds all known past records of the human family.

The following is a quotation from a prewar article by Samuel B. Pettengill:

We have six percent of the world's land area and seven percent of its people. But that seven percent has thirty-two percent of the world's railway mileage, fifty-eight percent of its telephones, thirty-six percent of its developed water power, seventy-six percent of the world's automobiles—enough so that every man, woman, and child under the flag; 130,000,000 Americans, could climb into these cars and all ride on rubber at the same instant of time, a nation on wheels, a miracle of achievement.

This little seven percent of the world's population has forty-four percent of its radios; produces sixty percent of the world's petroleum, forty-eight percent of its copper, forty-three percent of its pig iron, forty-seven percent of its steel, fifty-eight percent of its corn, fifty-six percent of its cotton, twenty-five percent of its sugar, thirty-three percent of its coal.

This seven percent of the world's population has forty-five percent of the world's total wealth; and far more than half of all the wheels that turn on this planet, . . . turn on American soil.

In the worst year of the worst depression of our history 30,000,000 out of 32,000,000 American boys and girls of school age stayed in public schools. And on the point of security for old age this little seven percent has \$108,000,000,000 of protection on the lives of 64,000,000 Americans, more security than all the rest of the world put together.

Truly this is a choice land—the richest nation under heaven. The Lord has kept his promise. We have been “free from bondage and captivity and from all other nations under heaven.” Materially we have excelled. We have become a great power. But what of our spiritual progress? Do we accept Jesus Christ as “the God of the land,” the Redeemer of the world? Do we worship him in spirit and in truth? Are we followers of the Prince of Peace and believers in his divine admonitions? He has clearly pointed the way and would that all his children might follow!

A DECLINE IN SPIRITUAL THINGS EVIDENT

Today the world is engaged in bloody conflict—a life and death struggle. Begun among Christian nations who had the Bible, it is resulting in a loss of life and property unequalled in the history of the world.

One might easily imagine a repetition of the words of the Master, spoken over disobedient Jerusalem, repeated today as he gazes from the heavens on this war-torn world:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. (Matthew 23: 37 and 38.)

Does not our house appear to be left to us desolate? Men seem to be groping blindly, aimlessly, without finding the way. With all our material progress we have made no appreciable advancement in human relations. Man still seems to be motivated largely by selfish interests without the power to control himself, his greed, and his passions. Is it not true that as a nation we have forgotten God? Yes, it seems clear that as a people we have become indifferent, irreverent seekers after passing pleasures which have no permanent value. We have turned away from the eternal principles of righteousness.

The words of the immortal Lincoln ring down through the ages as a solemn indictment today:

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown; but we *have forgotten God*. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to God that made us. It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.

In our rush for material things we have forgotten “the God of this land.” We claim to be a Christian nation, but we ignore the

teachings of Christ. Religion seems to be a declining influence in the lives of our people. Records show that more than half of our population are not members of any church and many of those who are members are passively inactive. It has been estimated that less than one-half of the children of the nation are being reached with any type of religious education. Recently published statistics show that but forty percent of the children of the United States between the ages of five and seventeen are enrolled in Sunday School. Concern has been expressed in recent years for the lack of support for the church and for the number of churches that have closed their doors. We seem to live in a nation of irreverence.

Devotion in the home, which in the past has been such an anchor to youth, has all but vanished. Few families unite daily in family prayer and the reading of the scriptures. Yet all will agree that this practice in years past contributed much to the strength of this great nation. We need the blessings which come from daily communion with God.

The ancient prophet, Isaiah, said:

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. (Isaiah 55:6-7.)

DISOBEDIENCE TO THE COMMANDMENTS WEAKENING THE NATION

One of the cardinal sins in our country is profanity—the taking of the name of the Lord in vain. Reverence for the name of deity is enjoined in holy writ. Jesus made this clear when teaching his disciples to pray; he said, addressing the Father, "Hallowed be thy name." Blaspheming the name of God separates man from his Creator.

And what of the holy Sabbath? From Mt. Sinai came the decree which is still in force: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Is not this day observed more as a holiday, a day of pleasure and indulgence with little thought for its sacredness? Would not a stranger in our land conclude that we consider this sacred law obsolete? The early citizens of this country respected the will of the Lord and observed this holy day as a day for rest and worship. They were blessed for so doing. We also need the blessings which come from Sabbath observance.

And what of our attitude as a nation regarding the sacred obligations of parenthood? "Multiply and replenish the earth" was among the earliest commands given of the Lord. No more sacred obligation has been placed upon men and women than that of honorable parenthood. We cannot escape the grave responsibility. The tragedy of broken homes—the breaking of the sacred bonds of holy matrimony on the least provocation is a national blot upon this great nation. The divine law: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" is still in force. Sexual sin is next to murder in the category

of crimes in the sight of God. Our record is such that it should have a sobering effect on all true Americans interested in the future welfare of the nation. We cannot continue to break these sacred laws without reaping the sad results of disobedience.

As a nation we need the refining and sustaining influences which come from obedience to divine law. Without such blessings the future of the nation is insecure. How can we expect divine acceptance when as a nation we are drunken through the staggeringly increased uses of intoxicating liquors, narcotics, and tobacco? The human body is the tabernacle of the spirit, and God expects that it be kept clean and unimpaired. The increase in these vices weakens the moral fiber of our nation and brings disappointment and sadness followed by greater sins.

INCREASE IN CRIME

One of the shocking results of disobedience to God's commandments is causing deep concern to most thoughtful people today. Is it not enough to sober us when Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, director of the F. B. I., reports an increase in 1943 of forty-three percent in arrests of boys under eighteen, and an increase of girl arrests under twenty-one of forty-eight percent? Broken down, the arrests of females under twenty-one for offenses against common decency, such as drunkenness, vagrancy, disorderly conduct, prostitution, commercial vice, and other sex crimes increased fifty-seven percent in 1943. For the two-year period, 1942-43, the increase was more than one hundred percent. It is no wonder that Mr. Hoover cries out in the face of these facts:

This country is in deadly peril. We can win this war, and still lose freedom for all in America. For a creeping rot of moral disintegration is eating into our nation. . . . America's youth, indicated by public opinion as reckless and carefree is blamed for these misdeeds, but the real fault lies elsewhere. Before any youth has broken the law, some adult has committed a more serious crime. Driven by lust for money or enslaved by pleasure, the adult generation forgets that the most solemn obligation any person can assume in the eyes of God and man is to guide and direct a child along proper paths. To place anything ahead of that responsibility is akin to criminal negligence.

Judge Harry S. McDevitt of Philadelphia is authority for the recent statement that "a new penitentiary should be built every other week to accommodate the United States' growing criminal population. The national prison population is increasing at the rate of 25,000 a year. Of the criminals sent to prisons, seventy-three percent are between 15 and 24 years of age." The records of the F. B. I. show that "more than 700,000 mothers in the United States mourn the fact that their boys and girls, all under voting age, either are or have been in jail, reformatories, prisons, or have met death in the electric chair. More than 13,000 families each year are directly affected by the results of criminal homicides, many of which are premeditated murders."

All these evidences are but the fruits of disobedience to divine injunction. Less obvious and more difficult to measure accurately are other evidences. We have become apathetic in our duty as citizens. The surprisingly low percentage of our people who exercise their right to vote for public officials is evidence of this fact. There are also in evidence, in this blessed land, certain other trends which strike at the very foundation of all we hold dear. If permitted to go unchecked, and there seems to be little disposition to correct them, we might easily lose most of what we have gained during the past 150 years of our national existence.

A NATION BLESSED "WHOSE GOD IS THE LORD"

May a kind Providence give us the vision and courage necessary to stem these dangerous trends. We need, as we need no other thing, a nationwide repentance of our sins. Never before have we needed the blessings of Almighty God more than today. We need his divine favor in the halls of government, in our homes, in the factories and shops, on the farms and on the battlefields of the world.

Scientific research has confirmed the inspired record of great nations which have inhabited this land. Each of these nations prospered as long as it yielded obedience to God. They also became great powers. Great material blessings came to them. But they forgot God. The ancient ruins of Central, South, and North America bear silent testimony to their destruction. What of the future of our great nation? The history of men and nations clearly teaches that only that nation is blessed "whose God is the Lord."

God is still at the helm. He rules in the affairs of men and nations. But he "cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance." No one will deny that sin has increased and goodness declined in blessed America. Let us yield then to Lincoln's fervent appeal, "to humble ourselves before the offended power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness." As a nation we have been kept as in the hollow of God's hand. But what of the future?

Down through the ages come the stirring and solemn words of ancient American prophets:

Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ. . . . For behold, this is a land choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. (*op. cit.* Book of Mormon.)

O, God our Father, grant that we, thy children, shall serve the God of this land, who is Jesus Christ, that this, our beloved country, might be preserved. Amen.