

Friday, April 5

First Day

Social Statistics

Birth rate per thousand	32.1
Marriage rate per thousand	13.7
Death rate per thousand	6.4
Service men from the stakes reported killed and missing in action in 1945	1,217

Missionaries

Number of missionaries in the missions of the Church	592
Number engaged in missionary work in the stakes	2,758
Total missionaries	3,350
Number of missionaries who received training in the Mission Home during 1945	362

ELDER JOHN A. WIDTSOE

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

My brethren and sisters: So far, this has been a very impressive session of the conference. We have heard the voice of the prophet of God. It is a pity for any people not to have a prophet to lead them. For our possession of prophet-leadership we are deeply grateful. We must have felt also very grateful as we heard the statistics read concerning the progress of the Church.

EVENTS OF A CENTURY AGO

My mind has been turned in comparison during this hour from the Church of today to the Church of yesterday. One hundred years ago the evacuation of Nauvoo began. John R. Young writes in his autobiography that one morning in February 1846—he was then about nine years of age—he awoke, dressed, and went down to the yard; there he saw people, some of his own and some strangers, loading the household furniture into two big wagons. He went to his mother and said: "Mother, what does all this mean?" She gathered him into her arms and said, "Son, we are going to leave our home, and we shall never see it again."

As I recall the date, it was about February 4 when the first two families crossed the Mississippi River among the ice floes. One of those families—unless I am very much mistaken—was headed by the great-grandfather of the present President of the Church, John Smith, famous in Church history. A little later, amidst a bitterly cold season, the water froze over the Mississippi; and the people were able then to take their wagons, their horses, and themselves on foot, across the ice on the way to the West. They began what in the history of the world is the greatest adventure of the kind ever known. Between fifteen and twenty thousand persons were moved bodily from a well-established city, in orderly fashion westward to an unknown destina-

tion. There were hardships on that trip; there was sickness; there was death; babies were born; but the procession moved onward. Contrast that with our happy surroundings here today: a great people, by the thousands, gathered together peacefully. This remarkable exodus—unique in the history of the world—makes us proud of our heritage. There are hundreds of descendants of the people who made that journey in this congregation today; and all of us are spiritual descendants of that group. We have all accepted the faith that they held. The achievements of these people, one hundred years ago, thrill us as we think back.

They knew in advance, some months before, that the evacuation had to be now. So, in Nauvoo all were busy. Wagons were being built; tires for the wheels were shaped; it was a busy season of preparation for the trip into the unknown West. Yet, in the midst of that labor and anxiety, my brethren and sisters, these people completed, as best they could, the building of the temple in Nauvoo. Eagerly and at any cost, at any sacrifice, the temple of God would have to be completed, sufficiently, at least, to enable these wanderers-to-be to receive their endowments in the holy temple of Almighty God. In fact, they were obliged first to dedicate that temple in part. The upper floor was dedicated first, in November, before the February of the exodus. There, then, many hundreds received their endowments. Later on, just before the presiding brethren left in April, they gathered quietly, privately, to the temple, and dedicated it to Almighty God. That having been done, they left it in the hands of Almighty God. But they brought with them to us, to these valleys of the mountains, and to all the Church thenceforth, as fruits of their labors, all the blessings from the temple, in which we are participants today.

These are thoughts that came to my mind as we heard the splendid address of our President, and the great report of the present condition of the Church.

PROPHECY OF JOSEPH SMITH FULFILLED

At least one prophecy of the Prophet Joseph Smith has been literally fulfilled. When he was not much more than a boy, in the early years of his manhood, before the Church was organized, the Lord said to him:

A great and marvelous work is about to come forth unto the children of men. (D. & C. 6:1.)

Unknown, untaught, with no reputation, he should have been forgotten in the small hamlet, almost nameless, in the backwoods of a great state; but he dared to say that the work that he was doing, under God's instruction, was to become a marvel and a wonder in the world. We know, my brethren and sisters, that whether it be friend or enemy who speaks of us, if he is a sober-thinking, honest man, he will declare that whatever in his opinion the foundations of this work may be—we know the foundations—it is a marvelous work and a

wonder, none like it in the long history of the world. The truths set loose by the Prophet Joseph Smith have touched every man of faith throughout the whole civilized world, and measurably changed their beliefs for good.

So they wandered on, these people from Nauvoo. Finally they reached this place. Their settlement here is not our story today.

PIONEERS CERTAIN OF THEIR BELIEFS

One cannot help wondering why amidst all manner of difficulties they undertook the perilous journey over deserts and plains. It would have been so easy to have said, as some few did: "This is paying too big a price. We will remain here. We will say to these enemies: 'Good-bye to Joseph Smith, good-bye to the Church. Why face this extraordinary request made upon us, that we move from civilization into the wilderness?'"

There must have been a good reason for the decision to go on. We know what the reason was. They dared to do what they did, to meet persecution, to meet difficulties, to face death if need be, because they were certain of their belief. There was no doubt about it in their minds. Certainty had removed all hesitation. They knew where they were going—not the identical place, to the Great Salt Lake Valley, where Salt Lake City was to be built—but they knew that God was at the head, that he was leading them to the right place. There was no doubt in their minds about that. They knew that God lives, a God who is anxious to help his children on this earth. They knew the reality of the mission, origin, and ancestry of Jesus Christ. There was no doubt in their minds about the divine mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Doubt and fear had fled. They who had doubts remained behind, but they who lived in the spirit of certainty came along.

WORLD NEEDS CERTAINTY TODAY

I wonder, if I may draw my conclusion in a few words, if certainty is not the world's great need today. Read the papers of today, conveying the news of the world to us. Read the articles on philosophy or religion or proposals to set things right in this world today. In them there is no certainty. Men say, "This will do," and other men say, "That will do." There is no unity of understanding, no certainty.

President Smith spoke today of the way to peace. He said: "We know the way to peace." They were the greatest words uttered at this session of the conference or that could be uttered—that we *know* the way to peace. Latter-day Saints who have sought the light, who have sought to find the truth, who have given themselves to the study and practice of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, know the proper way of life. There is no doubt or hesitation about the issues of life. Those things have fled. Certainty is the world's great need. From congressional or parliamentary halls, from the halls of leadership everywhere in the world, the great cry issues: "Teach us how to be certain

that what we do is right, and for the good of the cause we represent."

The voice of certainty, perhaps the greatest need of the world, is the great message of Mormonism to all people. In the gospel of Jesus Christ are a few simple fundamentals, eternal truths, which, if accepted, may serve as foundation stones of every structure that lead to man's permanent and eternal good.

FAITH OF PIONEERS

These people who crossed Iowa, moving towards Winter Quarters, had lost a prophet. They had been robbed of the man they loved, who had conversed with God, who had been instrumental in organizing the Church, through whom they had been guided. It was a terrible loss; but did they fear? They knew the truth of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. They were certain of its origin. They were certain of the priesthood, with its power and authority. Here was another man, just a plain ordinary man, a painter, glazier, and woodworker, a man highly endowed by nature, but there were others likewise endowed. On this man had been conferred the authority of leadership, even as Joseph the Prophet had it. The followers did not hesitate a moment. God's work is continuous, eternal, and they followed the new leader as they followed Joseph in the days before, and as we will, I hope, follow our leaders today. May I here interject this thought: There has been no diminution of power and leadership in this Church since the days of the Prophet Joseph. The same authority is possessed today as then; and the men who possess that authority in our day are as capable as those of the past in carrying forward the work of the Lord.

Such are the lessons from the past. History is a dead thing unless used as lessons for us of a later day. We think of the events of a hundred years ago. Contrasted with conditions in the Church today, we read lessons in courage and faith to help us in our daily walk before the Lord and before our fellow men.

In conclusion, our great need is to learn how to be sure and certain of the things that pertain to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and be courageous in following them. Certainty is but another name for a part of faith. Without faith we can do nothing; with faith anything may be accomplished. In this the great latter-day kingdom of the Lord, we live and move and have our very being in faith. Our forebears, one hundred years ago, trudged across the plains of Iowa, and beyond, knowing that they were destined, if they obeyed truth, to help build the kingdom of God upon the earth. Let us go forward today with the same faith and certainty. May we feel just as certain as they did that we in this day of many problems, have the same great destiny—to help build the kingdom of God on earth. Make us strong in our labors to complete our destiny. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.