

President George Albert Smith:

I cannot resist the temptation to say that it is worth the trip from Los Angeles or New York or San Francisco to be in this house and see the voting for the General Authorities of the Church. As your hands go up it is a real picture. We appreciate the harmony and the unity with which these officers have all been sustained.

ELDER JOSEPH L. WIRTHLIN*First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric*

It is with a prayer in my heart, my brethren and sisters, that I attempt, this afternoon, to express one or two thoughts.

THE PRE-EXISTENT STATE

This morning as we listened to that beautiful number, rendered in such an inspirational way by the choir of Ricks College, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," it took my mind back into the pre-existent state, when God our Eternal Father sat in counsel with the great and the mighty ones in an endeavor to evolve a plan whereby his children might come to the earth and have all the experiences of mortality, and at the same time, a plan which would permit them to return and dwell with him throughout the eternities to come. There were presented in that great council two plans; one by Lucifer, a son of the morning. His proposal was that all of the children of God should be saved and returned to him. But he would force salvation upon them, and for that achievement he was to have all of the honor and the glory. That plan was rejected and another son of God came forth in the spirit of, "Lord, here am I," proposing a plan whereby all spirits should have their free agency and where, through a gospel of love, a gospel which would bring them a knowledge and a testimony that God the Eternal Father loved them and because of his great love for them, they in turn would love and obey the Lord and thereby have the privilege of returning to his presence.

I am quite sure that when our Heavenly Father looked into that great multitude of spiritual faces, he knew that there were not any two of them alike, in personality, or in gifts or talents, and hence a plan had to be adopted which would fit all of these personalities and their talents. Hence, he accepted the plan of the Lord Jesus Christ; and then he so loved the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son that whosoever believed in him should not perish but should have everlasting life.

ADVENT OF THE SON OF GOD

In the meridian of time the Son of God appeared among men,

and he made it plain that he had come to serve God and to give God all the glory and the credit for his achievements, and said he,

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. (John 6:38.)

He also taught the people that he had come as the living bread which came down from heaven.

... if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:51.)

As we contemplate the ministry of the Savior, we will recall the time when, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he suffered spiritual and mental anguish in anticipation of the crucifixion that was just about to take place, and in that hour he called to his Father in heaven,

... if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. (Matt. 26:42.)

And the Savior was crucified. His bleeding and pierced body was taken down from the cross, consummating the plan of the great atonement, as Paul said,

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. (I Cor. 15:22.)

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

There was another father and his son, Father Abraham, a man without guile, and who was privileged to walk and talk with divine beings. Abraham was an old man, a man ninety-nine years of age, and up to that time he had not been blessed with a son by his wife Sarah. Three heavenly messengers appeared to him and promised that he and Sarah in their declining years should have the blessing of a son. A son was born unto them, and he was named Isaac, becoming their most precious possession. Abraham heard the voice of the Lord calling and in response to the Lord said, "Behold, here I am," and the Lord said to him:

... Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. (Gen. 22:2.)

Abraham secured wood and a knife and requesting two young men to accompany him, made the journey to the base of the designated mountain, and there Abraham requested the two young men to remain behind, and taking Isaac by the hand pushed toward the summit. Arriving there, an altar was built, wood was placed upon it. The curiosity of the boy was aroused, and he asked his father, "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

Abraham's faith in God was so implicit and profound that, al-

though in the moment of offering up his own son, he felt that God would provide a lamb for the sacrifice. Isaac was bound upon the altar. The arm of Abraham was raised to strike the fatal blow when he heard the voice of an angel calling to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him, a ram caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." (See Genesis 22.)

Abraham's faith in God was wholly justified, for while he was about to sacrifice his own son, God provided a ram. The obedience of Abraham in this incident, without a doubt, is one of the greatest examples of obedience in the history of the whole human family, and because of his great love for God and having implicit faith in God, God made him the father of all nations, promising him that his descendants would be as numerous as the sands of the seashore. God so loved the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son, and Abraham so loved God that he was willing to sacrifice his son at the command of God.

APOSTASY FROM THE TRUTH

The law of sacrifice was ended upon the cross and a new era was inaugurated, the era of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which would give men the opportunity to serve God in the spirit of love. After the crucifixion and the resurrection of the Savior, his apostles went forth and preached the gospel of the kingdom. Shortly after, they too gave their lives and disappeared; the Church's organization disintegrated; men substituted their own doctrines for those of the Christ; they changed the organization and the ordinances; and it was only a short time until the shadow of the great apostasy was upon the earth. For some two thousand years ecclesiastical and political tyranny dictated to men as to what kind of God they should worship and what kind of principles they should follow and obey. There were many of them who had the inherent blessing in their hearts, that of free agency, who refused to accept man-made gods and man-made doctrines, and consequently, the penalty was death. But the dawn of a new day was upon the horizon, the day when the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ should be restored, and in answer to the supplication of a humble boy in the woods of western New York, that same God who presided in the great spiritual council, and his Son, Jesus Christ, who had been crucified and resurrected stood before him. The Father introduced him, saying to the boy, "This is my Beloved Son, hear him!"

RESTORATION OF THE GOSPEL

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was restored in its fulness,

and just one hundred and eighteen years ago, on this very day, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ was officially organized. It has a complete organization, with a prophet of God standing at its head, twelve apostles, and the two priesthoods, and with every officer that is necessary to have it function as perfectly in behalf of the Lord's children as it did two thousand years ago.

The people joined the Church by the hundreds, those who had been seeking light and truth. The early members of this Church were driven from Kirtland to Independence, and from Independence to Nauvoo, and from Nauvoo to these promised valleys. Perhaps we shall never realize or know what they suffered or what they went through. In thinking of them, with your indulgence I would like to speak of my own grandfather. He caught the spirit of gathering in one of the far-off European countries, and made the long journey to the valley of the Great Salt Lake. Upon arriving here he stood on what is now Main Street, with just the clothes he had on his back, with one silver dollar in his pocket, and a pair of shoes that were about worn out, for he had made the long trek from the banks of the Mississippi to the valley of the Great Salt Lake afoot. He soon married; and going out to what is now the corner of Eighth East and South Temple, he built a mansion, a one-room dugout in the ground. Becoming somewhat prosperous, after two years they came up out of the ground and erected two rooms upon the surface. Here my father and other children were born. They were in the vale of poverty, but that mattered not. They had received the light and the truth of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They felt it was not only a blessing for them, but a blessing also for their unborn posterity, even down to the fourth and fifth generations. Were they not in the shades of the temple of which Isaiah spoke, which was being slowly but surely erected? Did they not have the privilege of coming into this historic building, hearing the voice of the prophets of God and accepting their counsel as if it came directly from God?

FAITH OF GRANDPARENTS

In a short time the Lord did speak to them through his prophet, my grandfather being called to go on a mission. They took inventory of their resources and discovered that they did not have the finances to pay his traveling expenses back to his mission field. It was decided to sell the family cow, their only source of food. It was sold without any hesitation, grandfather taking the money and making his way back to Switzerland. My grandmother had the responsibility of maintaining the family and of doing what she could for her husband in a financial way. She went to work sewing salt sacks for one dollar a thousand, payable in tithing scrip.

I am quite sure that many of us would say that was a great sacrifice; that it was in the extreme; that it was fanatical. We might even say it was radical; but I want to say that if any of us were ever to make such an accusation against our grandparents who gave their

all for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are forgetting that they loved God with all their soul, might and strength. We forget too, that God had endowed them with a divine revelation that we call a testimony by the power of the gift of the Holy Ghost, so that they knew that God lived, they knew that he who was crucified upon Calvary's Hill was the Redeemer of the world, and the humble boy who supplicated God in the woods of New York was his chosen servant in the last days through whom the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was restored. To accuse them of being fanatical would be to accuse God of being fanatical, because he gave his Only Son, it would be to accuse Abraham of being radical, because he too was willing to sacrifice his only son upon God's command.

The spirit of the pioneers is reflected in these words, "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of God shall give unto you."

TWO KINDS OF SACRIFICE

In thinking of our fathers; our Heavenly Father, our father Abraham and our pioneer forefathers, I wonder what all this means, to you and to me. I wonder if we accept the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and all of its obligations as an opportunity, or I wonder if we accept these obligations somewhat in the spirit of sacrifice. I tell you there are two kinds of sacrifices. The greatest sacrifice was made by God, namely the offering of his son for the atonement and salvation of mankind, and that of Abraham in the offering of his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice out of pure love for God and his full understanding of the law of obedience. The other kind of sacrifice has the atmosphere of selfishness which causes men to feel that they are giving too much for this great cause, and that kind of sacrifice, let me tell you, circumscribes and restricts people in their activities in this great Church, for God expects us to give liberally and freely of our talents, our resources and our all for the upbuilding of his kingdom, as did our pioneer forefathers.

Do you approach your assignments in the spirit of sacrifice, do you do your temple work in the spirit of being a savior on Mt. Zion, or do you do it in the spirit of sacrifice? Do you pay your contributions as a sacrifice or do you pay them because you wish to express gratitude to God for the many blessings that he has bestowed upon you, and you are but returning that part which belongs to him? Do you who are called to go out and teach the people the doctrines of the kingdom, do it in the spirit of sacrificing your time, or do you do it in the spirit of liberality, with a desire to contribute all you can for the salvation of the souls of our Heavenly Father's children? Do you who send out missionaries, do it in the spirit of sacrifice or do you do it in the spirit of promulgating through your children the gospel of Jesus Christ as your forefathers and mine preached it? If we go forward in the spirit of the gospel, which is the spirit of opportunity, the spirit of service and love, there is no question that the Lord

God will bless us and keep his promises in providing us with our daily needs. We should always follow the admonition of the Savior,

. . . seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matt. 6:33.)

never forgetting that the first and great commandment is to,

. . . love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. (Mark 12:30-31.)

which brings me to another thought. When thinking of this great welfare program can you think of an opportunity that is comparable to it in loving our neighbors as we love ourselves? If modern-day Israel ever received a revelation in this day with reference to what we should do in loving and helping our neighbor, let me tell you the opportunity has come through the great welfare program of this Church. The hundred carloads of food that we have sent has been a blessing to those who have been in need, but think of the blessings that will come to us because we thought of them, expressing our love in food and clothing.

LOVE OF GOD REQUIRES ACTION

Love of God is something that requires action, for men cannot have faith in God, nor love him, unless they are acting in his cause, with their whole heart constantly thinking of him and giving of their physical strength in love.

. . . God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son. (John 3:16.)

and Abraham so loved God that he was willing to give his son, and your fathers and mine so loved God that they gave their all to establish the kingdom here in the tops of the mountains, where you and I might enjoy every blessing which will be for our spiritual and temporal good. Let us remember this, too, that God calls men in this day exactly as he called in the day of Abraham, exactly as he called in the day of the Savior, and in the day of Joseph Smith. He may call to you and he may call to me, through his servants—the First Presidency of the Church, through the Council of the Twelve or through any of the other General Authorities. He may call to us to render some service through the stake presidency or our bishop, and please remember when they call, it is the voice of God, speaking through them to us, and they are not calling because of their choice, but because they are God's servants endowed with the authority to call upon us to render service whenever it is needed. So, in the Spirit of Jesus when that call comes let us answer as Abraham answered, and as the Prophet answered, and as your forefathers and mine answered; "Lord, behold, here am I," and never forgetting that God

so loved the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that he who believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life, which I pray will be the blessing and the destiny of each and every one of us, in the name of our crucified Savior. Amen.

President George Albert Smith:

Elder John A. Widtsoe of the Council of the Twelve will now address us, although he has been advised by those who have been looking after his welfare that he must not exert himself, but we know he would like to bear his testimony and other than that do as he pleases.

ELDER JOHN A. WIDTSOE

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

My brethren and sisters, it is always a great privilege to be allowed to bear testimony of the truth of the great work in which we are engaged. It may be in the great Tabernacle where we are now assembled or it may be in a humble cottage meeting; it matters little. It is very good for all of us, every member, to give voice to his testimony, to his belief, to his faith in this the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

TESTIMONY OF THE TRUTH

This work is of God; established by him, by the voice of revelation. It is the truth. It has been my joy, throughout the years of my life, to discover from time to time, that every principle, every doctrine, every historic event in the building of this great latter-day kingdom, are in harmony with every discovered and revealed truth. This is the truth, and we must rely upon it, learn to understand that it is the truth; otherwise the great joy that the Lord has offered us in this work will not be ours. I agree with Brigham Young that another name for the gospel might well be truth.

Along with truth comes light. Light is never found except in the presence of truth. The Lord in his latter-day revelations said over and over again that truth and light go together. We who receive truth have light to point the way, to solve our problems, to tell us where we are going, and to give us an enlightening faith to help us in the journey of life.

Truth also does something else for us: It gives us power, not only principles and doctrines of truth and light, but it also gives power to accomplish the work of the Lord in these latter-days.

THE SEALING POWER

I trust all of us listened intently to the sermon by Elder Joseph Fielding Smith today. The power of the priesthood, the power of this