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A Call to Repentance

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Abstract: America is a choice land and all who possess it must repent and serve God or be swept off.

A Call to Repentance

By Elder B. H. Roberts, of the First Council of Seventy, and President of the Eastern States Mission

This certainly is a very great surprise to me. I think none of the presidents of missions, or any member of the First Council of Seventy, ever expect that they will be called upon the first day of the conference to take up any portion of the time. It may take a moment or two for me to get over my astonishment, and to begin thinking about what I may say to you on this occasion. However, very much of that great theme upon which our president has been speaking this morning deals with matters that are very important and of which I have thought much of late.

I have been very greatly impressed during the last few months, while trying to deliver the message of our Church to the world, with the importance of the message that we have, not only for individuals, but for our nation. Of course our message is primarily to individuals; it is a call to repentance for men individually; a call to repent of their sins, and, through the ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ, obtain remission of their sins, and be born again into fellowship with God. Our effort is to bring the lives of men into union with the spirit life of God, and thus become spiritually alive; and this message of the gospel is unto all those who have not received it.

But also, it is foreshadowed in that great prophecy, of which so-called "Mormonism" is a fulfilment, that this message is to be delivered to every nation and kindred and tongue and people; and I believe to nations as such. And especially is this so with reference to the Gentile nations of this new world—the two great continents of America. And again is this especially so with that great Gentile nation known as the United States of America, which, because of its influence and of its power, dominates the new world, and, in my judgment, always will.

The Lord made certain promises in ancient times concerning the land of Zion—North and South America. We are told in the book of Ether that when the floods receded from this land, it became a choice land unto the Lord, a land which he would dedicate to freedom, and hence, to free institutions, and unto a righteous people. That is the information we get from our Book of Mormon. And later on, in the history of this book, we get further information as to the decrees of God concerning this land. As follows, for instance:

"And, he had sworn in his wrath unto the brother of Jared that whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them."

Now, mark you this:

“And now we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity.

“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. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off.

“And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done.

“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, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written.”

I think that is rather an important message, national in its scope and spirit, and awful in its warning; and I believe that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is under obligation to lay emphasis upon this part of its mission. Knowing the decrees of God concerning the fate of the nation that shall depart from God, and fill up the measure of its iniquity, would it not be a great sin of omission if we did not make proclamation of the decrees of God concerning this land?

In the fore part of the Book of Mormon—in the writings of Nephi, there is a message similar in importance. It is in Second Nephi—the first chapter, as I now remember it; and it there describes in effect, the rise of a great Gentile nation that shall be used as an instrument in the hands of God in restoring Israel unto their possessions in this land. There is no escaping the inference that there is held in the mind of the prophet the nation of the United States, and that it should become as a nursing father and mother to the remnants of Israel in this land, and should be instrumental in bringing to pass, in a large way, the will of God with reference to the accomplishment of his purposes in the land. In other words, it is quite clear from the Book of Mormon, that God has designed to bless the Gentile nations upon this land of Zion, if only they will be true to him and to the great principles of righteousness that enter into the very attributes of God. And, on the other hand, dire calamity is predicted upon the proud Gentile nation in this land if it fails God as an instrument in the accomplishment of his high purposes. Lehi says:

“Notwithstanding our afflictions, we have obtained a land of promise—” (referring to America)—“a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. * * * Wherefore, I Lehi prophesy according to the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord. Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the com-

mandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound cursed shall be the land for their sakes, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever." (II Nephi 1:5, 6, 7).

Referring to the time when the Lord would begin to gather Israel from their long dispersion from the four parts of the earth, the Lord says concerning the Gentiles:

"And the nations of the Gentiles shall be great in the eyes of me, saith God, in carrying them forth to the lands of their inheritance.

"Yea, the kings of the Gentiles shall be nursing fathers unto them, and their queens shall become nursing mothers; wherefore, the promises of the Lord are great unto the Gentiles, for he hath spoken it, and who can dispute?

"But behold, this land, saith God, shall be a land of thine inheritance, and the Gentiles shall be blessed upon the land

"And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles.

"And I will fortify this land against all other nations.

"And he that fighteth against Zion shall perish, saith God. * * * Wherefore, for this cause, that my covenants may be fulfilled which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are in the flesh, I must needs destroy the secret works of darkness, and of murders, and of abominations.

"Wherefore, he that fighteth against Zion, both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female, shall perish; for they are they who are the whore of all the earth; for they who are not for me are against me, saith our God.

"For I will fulfil my promises which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are in the flesh." (II Nephi 10:9-17.)

In another part of the Book of Mormon are the very words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, in relation to this subject—in Third Nephi, and having in mind more especially the existence of a great Gentile nation in this land, which shall be given very exalted privileges, and upon whom shall be bestowed great power for the accomplishment of God's purposes:

"And blessed are the Gentiles," (said the Savior) "because of their belief in me, in and of the Holy Ghost, which witnesses unto them of me and of the Father.

"Behold, because of their belief in me, saith the Father, and because of the unbelief of you, O house of Israel, in the latter day, shall the truth come unto the Gentiles, that the fulness of these things shall be made known unto them."

All of which was done, of course, in the coming forth of the dispensation of the fulness of times, in this land of America, and under the auspices of guaranteed religious liberty, set forth in the constitution of the United States.

"But wo, saith the Father, unto the unbelieving of the Gentiles—for notwithstanding they have come forth upon the face of this land, and have scattered my people, who are of the house of Israel; and my people

who are of the house of Israel have been cast out from among them, and have been trodden under feet by them;

“And because of the mercies of the Father unto the Gentiles, and also the judgments of the Father upon my people who are of the house of Israel, verily, verily, I say unto you, that after all this, and I have caused my people who are of the house of Israel to be smitten, and to be afflicted, and to be slain, and to be cast out from among them, and to become hated by them, and to become a hiss and a by-word among them—

“And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them.”

I want to suspend reading the remainder of this passage for a moment, while I call your attention to the fact that the conditions here named, as to the Gentile nation in this land, are wonderfully fulfilled. When this Book of Mormon came forth in 1830, there were about twelve millions of people in the United States; now we have nearly three times that number in the Eastern States Mission alone; and in all the United States, we exceed by considerable, a hundred millions within the borders of continental United States. It was a very bold prediction to write in a book in 1830, when the United States occupied practically only the Atlantic seaboard, and the Ohio valley, to some extent—it was a rather bold prediction to write in a book the prophesy that this Gentile nation—the United States—would be “exalted above all other nations, and above all the people of the whole earth.” But witness its fulfilment today! It is true, and this nation, had in mind when this prediction was sent forth in our modern language, was regarded merely as an experiment in government, and no such future was ever dreamed of for it as is here predicted, and now fulfilled. And also the other and the sadder part of it; namely—that they would not only be lifted up in power above all other nations, but also they would be filled with all manner of lyings and deceits, and mischiefs and hypocrisies and murders and priestcrafts and whoredoms and of secret abominations—“And if they do all these things, and shall reject my gospel—” and behold, that is what the people of the United States did when they rejected from habitation among them, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and expatriated the membership thereof, so that they were under the necessity of finding a refuge in a land, which, at the time our fathers entered it—The Salt Lake Valley—was no part of the United States of America—but was Mexican territory.

Listen to this: it is a revelation that we do not often refer to, but it has some very choice gems in it. It is the “Word and Will of the Lord to President Brigham Young,” given at Winter Quarters, and, among other things, this was said:

"Thy brethren have rejected you and your testimony, even the nation that has driven you out;

"And now cometh the day of their calamity, even the days of sorrow, like a woman that is taken in travail; and their sorrow shall be great unless they speedily repent, yea, very speedily.

"For they killed the prophets, and them that were sent unto them; and they have shed innocent blood, which crieth from the ground against them."

I think our country at that time did not repent of the wrongs they had done in this and other things, for this proclamation was immediately followed by the war with Mexico, in which at least those regiments that were selected from western Illinois—one of them at least, was well nigh wiped out of existence in the war with Mexico; and it was about the only disastrous engagement that we had in that war. Then followed the awful war, between 1861 and 1865, in which, as I believe, the hand of God severely punished the United States of America, in fulfilment of the wonderful prediction that was made by the Prophet Joseph Smith, in relation to the calamities that would befall the nation. But they rejected the gospel, and that is foreshadowed in this Book of Mormon passage, and confirmed in the passage in the revelation through Brigham Young. And, by the way, in confirmation also of what President Grant said about the Prophets Joseph and Hyrum sealing their testimony with their blood this revelation has a word on that also. Speaking of the worth of the labors of the Prophet, how he laid the foundation of it and was faithful:

—"And I took him to myself.

"Many have marveled because of his death; but it was needful that he should seal his testimony with his blood, that he might be honored and the wicked might be condemned. Have I not delivered you from your enemies, only in that I have left a witness of my name?"

Earth must atone; the nation in which he lived had to atone for the blood of that just man—Joseph Smith—a prophet—and I witness to you that our nation did suffer and did atone, as I believe, for the great crime against human liberty and the work of God, which, as a nation, they rejected when they expatriated the Latter-day Saints.

And now having paused to note the fulfilment of this prophetic part of the Book of Mormon passage, let us note what follows. "I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them," were the last words I read in the passage which I suspended reading. And now, continuing:

"And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.

"And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel.

"But if the Gentiles will repent, and return unto me, saith the Father, behold they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel."

Notwithstanding the list of their abominations—great as it is—

notwithstanding their rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the people of God, yet, if they will *but repent*, God promises to renew their lot and their part in the glories of this great Latter-day work.

Shall we not, then, proclaim to our nation and to all the inhabitants thereof this glorious promise that is held out of the Lord unto them? And the fact that we have eight missions established within the boundaries of the United States, and are laboring with all diligence to make proclamation of the Gospel—is it not good evidence that God is willing that we should continue our labors among the people of the United States to bring them to repentance, and to a participation in these great purposes and designs of God, in relation to this land of Zion and the work He designs to bring to pass upon it?

I continue the passage:

“But if the Gentiles will repent and return unto me, saith the Father, behold they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel.

“And I will not suffer my people, who are of the house of Israel, to go through among them, and tread them down, saith the Father.

“But if they will not turn unto me and hearken unto my voice—”

Then he will suffer his people to go through them to destroy them, and so following. I should be pleased to read still other words of the Lord Jesus Christ to the same effect. I have read from the 16th chapter of Third Nephi. In the 20th chapter all this is practically repeated and much more added, and in these latter passages emphasis is laid upon the fact that if the Gentiles on the land of Zion will repent and return unto the Lord, behold his mercies shall be extended to them, and they shall inherit the promises of God and have lot and part in the glory and peace and liberty and prosperity that God designs to bring forth upon the land of Zion.

This, then, is what I think constitutes the national phase of our mission to the United States—to make proclamation unto the inhabitants of all the land that these are their opportunities and their blessings if only they will extend their hands and receive them. And, on the other hand, woe be unto them if they hearken not unto the message of God, after all His great mercies unto them.

I should have been pleased, could time possibly have been had, to present to you the full indictment, the indictment that is being made against the United States for the lawlessness of its people, the increase of crime during the last twenty years especially, and especially those crimes of violence that end in murder, in its various degrees. In these higher crimes the United States of America is the most criminal nation on earth today. I must be permitted to give at least a little evidence to this statement. On August 10, 1922, there was published in *Current History*, for September, a Report of the Special Commission of Law Enforcement, made at a meeting of the American Bar Association at San Francisco, from which I quote the following:

“From all the data and opinions of experts which your committee has been able to gather, we beg leave to report that—particularly since

1890—there has been, and continues, a widening, deepening tide of lawlessness in this country, sometimes momentarily receding, to swell again into greater depth and intensity. At intervals this tide billows into waves that rise and break but only for a time attracting public attention. * * * The criminal situation in the United States, so far as crimes of violence are concerned, is worse than that in any other civilized country. Here there is less respect for law. While your committee cannot obtain the exact figures, from all available sources of information we estimate that there were more than 9,500 unlawful homicides last year in this country; that in 1920 there occurred not less than 9,000 such homicides, and that in no year during the last ten years did the number fall below 8,500. In other words, during the last ten years, no less than 85,000 of our citizens have perished by poison, by the pistol or the knife, or by some other unlawful and deadly instrument. Burglaries have increased in this country during the past ten years 1,200 per cent.

“We deem it important to note the material difference between the character of crime conditions prevailing here and those abroad. Our regrettable eminence is due in most part to crimes of violence against the person and property. In 1910, out of the 58,800 confined in our State and Federal prisons, 15,316, or more than 25 per cent of all prisoners, had committed homicides. While of course this number includes the accumulation of years, this awful fact still bears its own significance. The evidence before us shows that there has been since 1910 a steady and terrible increase not only in homicides, but also in burglaries and robberies. One State has in its different prisons 3,547 inmates; of these 1,429 are guilty of taking the lives of human beings. * * * Crime and lawlessness in the United States have been steadily on the increase and out of proportion to our growth, and there has been a steady and growing disrespect for law. In our opinion this is not a result of the war. We do not find the proportional increase in crime from 1916 to 1922 greater than from 1910 to 1916, and we have not been able to discover that crimes of violence have materially increased in France, England or Canada during or since the war, although the effects of the war naturally must be more marked in those countries.”

In the face of these conditions, of the truth of which there can be no question—is it not necessary to sound this note of warning against lawlessness throughout the United States? I am happy in the thought that the President of our Church—God’s prophet in the earth—in his opening remarks this morning put his finger upon the one great fact and uttered a warning that ought to be stressed—a warning against the lawlessness that obtains throughout our country. It is fitting that his voice should sound the key-note of warning, because that is what God would have the people of the United States warned of—the wickedness that exists among them, and the calamity that will follow if they do not repent.

I bear witness to you, from my heart, that the inspiration of God has dictated to our President the Key-note words of warning in this conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. May we sense the responsibility resting upon us as a great missionary Church in the earth, charged with the solemn duty of calling men to repentance, and warning nations against the fate that awaits the nation that lapses into lawlessness, crime, and unrighteousness; for God, in these things will not be mocked. May we sense our duty and responsibility is my prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen.