



Type: Magazine Article

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 23, No. 6 (April 1920), pp. 517-525

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The Church Will Prevail

By Osborne J. P. Widtsoe

It is as natural as that the rising sun should appear in the east to spread its glory gradually over the world, that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should prosper and progress, to come ultimately to possess the earth. It was no vain vision of the ancient prophet's which led him to declare, "Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. * * * And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." Nor was it a vain imagining of the Master's that led him to assert, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." There are, indeed, certain fundamental principles of righteousness upon which the privileges of possession are based. The non-observance, or the violation of those principles, brings about disaster. The strict observance of those principles assures success. And the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will grow and gain possession as surely as the sun doth rise, if only it remain true to the genius of its inspiration.

One hundred years ago, the prophet-boy, Joseph Smith, beheld a heavenly vision. This was the first of many visions and revelations—direct communings with the Eternal Powers. The prophet-boy grew to be a prophet-man. Always the line of direct revelation was open. For a quarter of a century he lived in continual communication with God. No other man in the history of the world has ever passed through a course of preparation, training, and achievement at all comparable with his. His teachers were of heaven, his instruction was God-inspired, and his mission divinely directed. He revealed to man a noble, celestial philosophy of life, and he established in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, an institution of economic, social, and spiritual solidarity. The work achieved by the great American Prophet during the short period of his active ministry lies beyond the limited powers of mere mortal man. It is a fit subject for years of research, and volumes of recorded study. It is, in fact, inexhaustible. One thought alone, however, inspires the present writing. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will prevail. It cannot fail on the foundations laid by the Prophet Joseph Smith. "The God of Heaven set up a king-

dom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

But what are some of the foundation principles laid by revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith that will make this prediction secure?

First, "Mormonism" stimulates to high and lofty endeavor: to the abundant production of the things that best support life, to the mastery of the forces of nature, and to pure and righteous living. While it is declared that man exists that he may have joy, it is by no means understood that man's joy is to be gained solely from physical or worldly pleasures. Indeed, while "Mormonism" encourages the seeking of wholesome recreation, it condemns the so-called pleasures of the world, and places a morally righteous interpretation upon the word joy. "Mormonism" inspires the desire to work, to do. It is distinctly a spur to energy—not to the dissipation of energy in fruitless pleasures, but rather to the direction of energy into righteous, productive channels. Real joy is derived from work and the conscious effort to attain the ultimate good. As the straying force that makes the wondrous display of lightning is chained by man and made to do useful service, so the straying energies of men are directed by the gospel of Jesus Christ and made to produce abundantly for the salvation of the children of God. The Saints are therefore admonished not to idle away their time, nor to deny their talents that they be not known. And it is specifically decreed that the idler shall not eat of the food produced by the laborer, nor wear the garments prepared by him.¹ Moreover, the rich are condemned, who hoard up their riches and refuse to give help to the poor and to continue the life of productivity; and the poor man is likewise convicted of sin, who will not labor with his own hands, "whose eyes are full of greediness," "and whose hands are not stayed from laying hold upon other men's goods." Those only are blessed "who are pure in heart, whose hearts are broken, and whose spirits are contrite, for they shall see the kingdom of God coming in power and great glory unto their deliverance; for the fatness of the earth shall be theirs."²

In its history, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has observed closely this principle of productivity and inspiration to endeavor. It was ordained, for example, that the land of Zion should not be obtained by the Saints except by purchase or by blood; "and if by purchase, behold you are blessed; and if by blood, as you are forbidden to shed blood, lo,

¹Doc. and Cov. 60:13; 42:42.

²Doc. and Cov. 56:16, 17, 18.

your enemies are upon you * * * and but few shall stand to receive an inheritance.”³ This passage cannot be mistaken. The land of Zion was not to be obtained by robbery or by bloodshed. It must be worked for—paid for with the results of productive labor, and built up by industry. The Saints failed—and their failure was due in part to their neglecting to observe the conditions on which they were to gain possession of the earth. On the other hand, when the pioneer bands reached the end of their migration westward, the wise leader, Brigham Young, who understood fully the genius of the Prophet’s mission, set his devoted followers to work tilling the soil, and applying their hands to the labor that should produce the substance of life. When he was told that there lay gold and precious metals hidden in the mountains that walled his people in, Brigham Young replied that he hoped it would remain there, and urged the people more vehemently to secure the land and to cultivate it. Others have come in to open up the veins of the everlasting hills. Some have gained wealth and some have become rich, but many thousands more have been laid away in paupers’ graves, as empty and poor as the sinkholes they have made in the mountains. Meanwhile, the Saints have continued in the main to practice the teachings of the inspired prophets. They have built up an agricultural, industrial community. Their business is to produce the goods needed by man in his complex life upon the earth. And they are urged to produce, not merely to acquire, wealth, with which they may afterwards live at ease; but they are urged to produce more that they may still produce more; and to use their wealth for further production to be used in the salvation of men—the economic and spiritual uplifting of the human race. Wealth is declared to be an unworthy object in itself; but everyone is encouraged to acquire wealth that he may the better help in the salvation of the race. And the Saints have been prospered. They have gained possession of land, and have learned to till it. They have been obedient, meek. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Not industry and productive energy alone, however, will gain possession of the earth. Coupled with intelligent industry must be the meekness that includes all righteousness—the meekness that causes one to bow in humility and obedience before the least expressed will of God. It is natural that man should work to gratify his physical wants. Such a desire is a spur to energy, an incentive to productive industry. Moreover, it stimulates man to master and to overcome the natural forces

³Doc. and Cov. 63:29, 30.

that stand between him and his achievement, or that may be harnessed and made to serve him in the achievement. But withal, to retain what one has gained, one must deal righteously and learn to love one's neighbor as oneself. To hold possession, one must have gained possession in righteousness, and one must continue to deal righteously forevermore. That meekness which is after God's own heart permits of no deviation from the straight and narrow way. The righteously productive man loves honesty, humility, charity, and patience, eschews evil, cleaves unto chastity and temperance, and would rather do hurt to himself than to his neighbor. Here, then, may be formed the first reason why the Church established by the Prophet Joseph Smith will come ultimately to inherit the earth: Its devotees are spurred to productive industry and they are meek.

Secondly, "Mormonism" stimulates to intellectual growth. After his bodily wants are satisfied, man strives to gratify his desire to know. It has been so since time began; it is so now; it will continue to be so through the countless eternities yet to be. This desire to know stimulates to greater endeavor. It is a further spur to energy. It uncovers the hidden forces of the universe and gains mastery over the elements. It makes production relatively easier, and permits more time again for mental endeavor. That institution only can be said to be established on the foundations of progress, which urges its followers to intellectual activity and growth. And therefore, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints cannot but inherit the earth. The Saints are not to be permitted to live in ignorance. For this reason the leaders were instructed early to prepare text-books for the use of the children.⁴ For this reason Church members were themselves urged to study and learn, to become acquainted with good books, with languages, with peoples, and to obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man, and all this for the salvation of Zion."⁵ And for the same reason, that Zion may be saved or prospered—and thus come to inherit the earth—the Saints have always been exhorted to teach diligently that everyone may become better instructed "in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the laws of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God." This teaching is to be comprehensive—"of things both in heaven and in the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and

⁴Doc. and Cov. 90:15; 55:4.

⁵Doc. and Cov. 93:53.

the judgments which are on the land, and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms." Moreover, it is to prepare the Saints for that possession which is inevitably theirs through their faithfulness and diligence, that such devotion to learning is urged.⁶ And that the desire to know should thus be an incentive to progress in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is readily understood when one reads that, "The glory of God is intelligence, or in other words, light and truth;" that "it is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance;"⁷ and that, "Whatever principles of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection; and if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come."⁸

These principles are beautiful in theory. They are not limited to theory, however, in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The house of worship and the house of learning go hand in hand in the communities of the Saints. When new territory is opened for settlement, the Saints build first the public house of worship or the Church, then the school house. The Church school system has pioneered the way in the intermountain West. It is maintained today as at least the equal of any other system of schools of like grade. It is fostered by the Church in the hope that it may grow in efficiency until it shall become in very deed second to none in all the world. In the meantime, the influence of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the far-reaching effects of the doctrine he presented, have helped to shape the destinies of thousands of ambitious young men, and thus of the Church. Education and special training have been sought the world over. The educators and the learned men in the Church have been inspired by the revealed attitude towards education to seek learning in the best universities in the world. All that is best in the world is being brought home, and to it is being added, not only the results of our own activity in the field of knowledge, but also the revealed word of God. And the interest of the Gospel re-established by the American Prophet is not limited to those fields of knowledge commonly misnamed practical. All that is good is recognized as of practical value, and as helping in the growth and development of man—in the helping of man to gain possession of the earth. Hence, literature is encouraged and fostered, music is highly developed, art is cared for with the tenderness of a mother. In the temples built to the Lord, the

⁶Doc. and Cov. 88:78-80.

⁷Doc. and Cov. 93:36; 131:6.

⁸Doc. and Cov. 130:18, 19.

best that art can produce in mural decoration and in paintings, in sculpture and in architecture, is sought and secured. If it is objected that we have not yet produced much of world greatness, the answer comes quickly and soundly that we are still young, that we have spent our best efforts to this moment in conquering the desert, that we are still pioneers in a new world, but that—under the divinely revealed incentive to knowledge and intelligence—we have already accomplished something, perhaps more than any other community in the same time under similar circumstances. And thus, because the Gospel that the Prophet Joseph Smith revealed stimulates, not only to material productivity and righteous living, but also to intellectual growth and aesthetic development, the Church which he founded is as sure to prosper and persist as is the sun to continue in its beaten way.

Thirdly, "Mormonism" stimulates to social service. Jesus himself has declared the law of Christian love to be "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The greater part of the Sermon on the Mount, many of the parables, and much of his general teaching are devoted to the expounding of man's duty to his fellowmen. It may be said that his own life was a glowing example of the practice of the law of love, and that this law was the very heart of his teaching. All the duties of man to his neighbor are based on the law of love. And this sympathetic impulse, the desire to do—to do for others—is likewise an important incentive to progress, without which no one can hope to inherit the earth. In "Mormonism" as revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the law of Christian love is again made fundamental to progress, achievement, and possession. Charity and love, with faith and hope, qualify a man for work.⁹ No one can assist in the great work of saving mankind "except he shall be humble and full of love."¹⁰ And it is the duty of the children of men to live together in love."¹¹ Moreover, to the great Prophet was repeated the commandment to love, with certain other commandments, revealing the fact that the law of Christian love comprehends the law of social interaction. Declared the Lord, "Wherefore I give unto them a commandment, saying thus: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, mind, and strength; and in the name of Jesus Christ thou shalt serve him. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Thou shalt not steal; nor commit adultery, nor kill, nor do anything like unto it. Thou shalt thank the Lord thy

⁹Doc. and Cov. 4:5.

¹⁰Doc. and Cov. 12:8.

¹¹Doc. and Cov. 42:45.

God in all things.”¹² Surely, whoso observes this commandment has learned to serve his fellowmen.

“Mormonism” stimulates, moreover, to render extra service. In the parable of the unprofitable servant, the conclusion is drawn—when the servant has waited upon the master at supper, after a long day’s work has already been done—“So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, “We are unprofitable servants: we have done [only] that which was our duty to do.” Plainly, the law of Christian love requires extra service. And “Mormonism” trains more effectively than does perhaps any other religious creed, or than does any other form of community organization, for the high ideal of efficient social life. Every Latter-day Saint is taught to render efficient service as a citizen of the kingdom of God. Every Latter-day Saint is urged to render efficient service as a citizen of the country in which he lives. Efficient citizenship is a watchword of modern Israel. And efficient citizenship can be attained only through observance of the law of love. “Thou shalt not speak evil of thy neighbor, nor do him any harm,” declared the Prophet.¹³ Every man shall seek “the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God.”¹⁴ And in harmony with the human law that when a man has found the religion that seems to him to be the best, “he would be forced to become an advocate of that religion,”¹⁵ modern revelation makes it incumbent upon its devotees to spread the glad tidings of good news among their neighbors. “Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned, to warn his neighbor.”¹⁶ And the state of the perfect neighbor is further expressed thus: “See that ye love one another; cease to be covetous, learn to impart one to another as the gospel requires; cease to be idle; cease to be unclean; cease to find fault one with another; cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated; and above all things, clothe yourselves with the bonds of charity, as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace.”¹⁷ Thus does the doctrine promulgated by the truly great prophet, Joseph Smith, urge men and stimulate them to gratify the de-

¹²Doc. and Cov. 59:5-7.

¹³Doc. and Cov. 42:27.

¹⁴Doc. and Cov. 82:19.

¹⁵Thomas Nixon Carver, *The Religion Worth Having*, p. 6, Houghton, Mifflin Co., New York, 1912.

¹⁶Doc. and Cov. 88:81.

¹⁷Doc. and Cov. 88:123-125.

sires of the sympathetic nature—to live the perfect law of Christian love. These are the basic incentives to human progress: The desire to work, the desire to know, the desire to do. In the Church established through the inspired genius of the Prophet Joseph Smith, these are fundamental. “Mormonism” stimulates to a truly productive expenditure of energy with high ideals of right living; it stimulates to lofty intellectual and aesthetic endeavor; and it urges social service and the practice of the law of love. Is it not to be expected that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will ultimately inherit the earth as surely as the sun will rise, if only the Church remain true to the genius of its inspiration?

In conclusion, two points need briefly to be mentioned to strengthen further the position here presented. It has been said that association is the law of human progress. Some will have it that association in equality is the law of human progress—meaning by equality, presumably, equal rights and privileges before the law. It is notable that Joseph Smith was a mighty advocate of association. Less than half a year had passed, after the organization of the Church, when the Prophet declared, “Wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father, that they [the Saints] shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land;”¹⁸ and throughout the revelations, the people are urged to gather in the land of Zion. Gathering, assembling for association, became thus an important principle of the restored Gospel. Through the practice of it, thousands of people left their homes and assembled in a new place with others of the same faith. And this association of like-minded people made it possible to put forth a concerted effort to produce, to learn, and to serve. It is, indeed, the doctrine that has given numerical strength to the Church, made possible its achievements, supports its present prosperity, and assures its ultimate triumph as a productive Church. If it is true that that religion is best “which (1) acts most powerfully as a spur to energy, and (2) directs that energy most productively,”¹⁹ it cannot be doubted that “Mormonism,” since it stimulates all the incentives to human progress, and puts in operation further the law of association, is to be accepted as the best religion—a living monument to the divine inspiration of the Prophet Joseph Smith. True, the doctrine of the gathering to the headquarters of the Church is no longer preached. Yet, the doctrine of gathering is an active principle. Wherever there is a branch or an organization of the Church, the people assemble in social intercourse, and in worship. Moreover, they are associated in

¹⁸Doc. and Cov. 29:8.

¹⁹Thomas Nixon Carver, *The Religion Worth Having*, p. 13.

the common aims, purposes, ideals of the Church. Concentration alone is no longer necessary; it has been accomplished, and serves its purpose. The same principle of association serves now in the outspreading organizations. Moreover, in their association in the Church, the people are equal. The Church is a democratic institution. The ideal is equality "that you may be equal in the bands of heavenly things."²⁰ And thus, again, since the law of association binds the people together, it is only natural to expect that the Church will ultimately triumph.

But the crowning feature, which makes it impossible that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should fail, is the fact that it is founded solidly on the rock of revelation, and reposes implicit faith in the doctrine of continual revelation: "Deny not the Spirit of revelation, nor the Spirit of prophecy, for wo unto him that denieth these things."²¹ It is well that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is securely founded in economic and social principles. It is well that modern revelation stimulates productive energy and insists upon right living; that it stimulates intellectual growth and fosters the arts and sciences; that it stimulates social service and makes for active, efficient citizenship in the governments of men. It is well also that it operates in the basic law of association, gaining strength from the assembling into one place of people of like faith and ambition. But while it is well it is not enough. Steadily to maintain the narrow way throughout the generations, there must needs be communion with the director of all. Where there is no revelation, the people perish; they wander from paths of rectitude; they deny even that which has given them life. This, then, is the sum of all: Not alone because the doctrines revealed through Joseph the Prophet spurs the energies of man to work, and to know, and to do; nor yet alone because it is based on the law of association, will it thrive and prosper; but because there is added hereto the still more basic principle of faith in God and his power to guide man by continued revelation—as times and seasons and countries shall require—will ultimate triumph be achieved. The far-reaching extent of the work of the Prophet Joseph Smith can not be declared; the monument he has erected to his memory cannot be measured. But this much is certain: It is as natural as that the rising sun shall appear in the east to spread its glory gradually over the world, that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should prosper and progress to come ultimately to inherit the earth.

²⁰Doc. and Cov. 78:5.

²¹Doc. and Cov. 11:25.