

SERMON
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D&C 6: 1a,b,c;2a;3a,b,c;4b

“A great and marvelous work is about to come forth unto the children of men: behold, I am God, and give heed to my word, which is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, to the dividing asunder of both joints and marrow: therefore, give heed to my words. Behold, the field is white already to harvest, therefore whoso desireth to reap, let him thrust in his sickle with his might, and reap while the day lasts, that he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God; . . .

Now, as you have asked, behold, I say unto you, Keep my commandments, and seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion: seek not for riches but for wisdom; and behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich. . . Say nothing but repentance unto this generation: keep my commandments, and assist to bring forth my work according to my commandments, and yea shall be blessed.”

I know we are all blessed by music. Certainly music touches my soul. I am touched also by the reading of the Scriptures. And I want to share with you one more verse of Scriptures before I begin my remarks tonight.

“I say to you that the thing that will be of most worth to you will be to declare repentance to this people that you may bring souls to me that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father.”

That challenge given to the early church, I believe, should and does resonate within this body of saints. We are the children of those men and women who sincerely accepted the commandments of God and went forth with the Gospel of the Kingdom in their mouth. They taught that gospel so that my forefathers were converted to the work. Through the generations—some five, six, now seven generations—they maintained their fidelity to the commandments of God. And I know that some of my more immediate forefathers have found rest with those righteous men of the first days of the Restoration Movement in the Kingdom of our Father.

We believe the time in which we live is unique. It’s a curious problem that all human beings have. As a history teacher, I am always startled by the fact that my students don’t believe anything important ever happened before they were born. As I got older, that became more distressing to me because the memory of my students got shorter and shorter (it seemed to me) about the things that were important. Of course, I was only giving importance to those things that had happened since I was born. So we do have this common belief that we evaluate what’s really important by looking at what has transpired in our own life span.

Tonight I would like us to ask us to elevate our concerns a little bit, beyond our immediate life times, to recognize that we are part of a long history of the church which begins in the days of Adam and which has been continued through thousands of people, yes, millions of lives, and hundreds and hundreds of years--that that great and vast body of the church has expectations for us. For it exists, it lives. Unlike those in the day of Jesus who were the Jews who believed that their forefather Abraham had died and Isaac had died, Jesus challenged that notion, saying to them, "God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living."

And I challenge you with that thought today. God is not a God of a church that has died, but is God of a church that is alive. The power of the heavens is available to us here on earth as we recognize our linkages with those who have gone before us. It is important, therefore, that we not deviate nor transgress the shape and the design of the Gospel of the Kingdom lest we put ourselves beyond the veil of that which God has ordained from the beginning. We are to be in His kingdom. We are not going to be able to invite Him and those forefathers of ours to live in our kingdom. We are invited into His Kingdom. We first have to understand where the vast majority of the church is--it is with Him. And they are there because of their willingness to be obedient to the commandments that He has given.

Now in every day, in every age, there is a tension that exists in the church. Tonight I want to talk to you about tension. I want to point out that the first word we see that is derived from the word tension is the word "attention." I hope I have your attention. That word, "attention", is part of the military ideal. The sergeant comes in and says, "Attention" and everybody snaps up straight. Really that means that our muscles, etc. get up tight. We use terms like that. Are you up tight about that? Are you under tension? Are you being stressed?

We notice there is quite a lot of stress going on in the church. I heard something that I resonated with the other day, that was that the church wasn't essentially a joyful experience for them. They said, "Since I joined the church, I have really been under a lot more stress than I ever was before." That might resonant with you.

You might discover, as you look back through your church life, it hasn't been a kind of a kind of drugged-out, pleased experience as T. S. Eliot said, "a patient etherized on a table." The Great and Marvelous work wasn't supposed to give us an unconscious acceptance of things without stress or tension. But rather, there is something vibrant about the work. It was a great and marvelous work that was going to come forth. And that implied an internal tension. Tonight I want to talk about that.

The essential tension that exists in the gospel of the kingdom (as we understand it), is very simple to see. It is couched in the--*Go forth and teach every nation the gospel*--and the injunction--"*gather into the Center Place*" to pool the resources of the saints and build up His kingdom--build up His Zion. Now how do you go out and use your resources to send into the world and at the same time gather in? How do you send forth and collect up? How does the storehouse balance with the going out into all the world.

My brother used to preach about this. He talked about a drunk cowboy. He said the church was like that drunk cowboy. He gets in the saddle all right, he gets on the horse all right, and he rides along pretty well, and then he goes around a curve and he simply falls out of the saddle on one side. He gets back on and he rides a little way, and abruptly falls out of the saddle on the other side. Now falling out of the saddle on one side or the other tends to be, in the historical passage of time, either in favor of our doing Zionistic activities, or our favor of doing the evangelistic activities. So we kind of wobble between those two poles. Maybe it hasn't occurred to us, but the truth of the matter is there is supposed to be tension. This is where God intended that the gospel be in tension, and that you as Saints be in tension, and that the Work be in tension. The stress that we are supposed to be feeling is the stress between those two poles. And they do pull us apart, and they put everything in between them under stress.

That might not be the kind of church you thought you joined. You might have thought that the church was supposed to give you a state of euphoria, some kind of a delirium of joy, in which we were all going to come together in a rapture of emotional support one for another, at one level or another, so that no problems would arise. If that's your design, if that's your desire, I think you are in the wrong place, because God has intended that there be an intrinsic and inherent pulling of the church in two directions simultaneously. Is that a bad thing?

It's an interesting thing. I have a granddaughter who wants to play the violin. If she slacked off all those strings until there wasn't any tension, I doubt she could get any sound out of it. In fact you have to put the tension exactly right to be able to play the instrument. I have a good friend, Brother Smith, who plays the guitar. I know that he has to tighten the tension or loosen the tension on those strings before they will play. But when he does, the music that's intended can be played because there is proper tension on the strings.

Now there is good tension and there is bad tension. I think that we are under tension most of the time for wrong reasons. I want to list a few of the wrong reasons that we are under tension. I think that we are under tension in the church because we have problems in our families. Because we have problems in our families, we have conflicts with each other, or we have conflicts in our branches, and they represent the conflicts or tensions between people. The Scriptures tell us that we need to resolve those things. That's a commandment. Don't have that kind of tension. It is not appropriate. If you are going to be part of the kingdom of God, if you are going to be involved in my work, there is a place for the work to be under stress and there are places for it not to be under stress. Those kinds of issues that often divide the work, are really rooted in our belief that somehow the stress that we are going through in our family or in our congregation is appropriate. It's all right, or it's important, or it's commanded of us, or it's demanded of us that we create the tensional issues about doctrine or about relationships. Those are not the kinds of tensions that we are supposed to be dealing with. We are supposed to resolve those.

Think of it like this, if you will, for a minute. Concrete is just made of dust. If you want to make concrete into rock, it can be done. That rock isn't particularly strong though unless cables are

imbedded in it. You know how they put cables in structural concrete? They stretch them as hard as they can and then pour that into the concrete and let it set. And when the concrete is set, they release the tension on the cables and you have an enormously strong piece of structural concrete that can be used. It is really just dust.

Aren't we made of the dust of the earth? We are supposed to be made into one, and there is a kind of an internal tension that is supposed to be in the work and it will make us enormously strong, giving great structural strength to us. But concrete can be destroyed. It can have little lateral cracks in it. You can get chips in it. You can get weathering in it. You can get sideways stresses in it, and you can break those structures even though they are properly tensioned.

Now that can happen to us as a people even though we are properly tensioned. We can have the lateral cracking—lateral stressing going on in the body. Some of the lateral stressing that has gone on in the body needs to stop. We need to elevate our questions and our issues from the ones that have been divisive, the ones that have been personal, the things that have dealt with (how shall I say it) picking at the doctrine until we can wound somebody with it and then picking at the scab until we can really hurt them, until they decide they can't abide us and they go somewhere else. We need to stop that. We are probably all of us guilty about that, so tonight understand that I am talking to myself as well as to others.

If the Lord is going to tune us and play the instrument that He intended for us, if we are going to make the sweet sound, then we have to have the appropriate stress. Now the interesting thing is that you can't stress cables to any useful purpose if they break. You can't tune your guitar if the strings break. We can't get anything out of this conference if we tune it up and it goes twang and breaks. Tonight the delegates and the members of this conference represent the largest body of saints that have met to deliberate the business of the Lord since 1984. There are about 2500 souls (saints) that are represented in the branches and the conferences that you come from. That's an enormous achievement. It can be enormously dangerous if what happens here is that we go home and we decide that we want to separate-- the twang will be tremendous.

You can get hurt when a cable breaks. We can and should pull, but we can't part. We can have issues with one another, but we can't separate. It's all right for us to understand that the church is supposed to allow for certain kinds of tensions to exist. There have always been doctrinal tensions. There has always been tension about design of where we go, and what we do, and what our priorities are. It's intended. It was given of God. You don't think that God is capable of resolving these little issues of doctrinal interpretation or curiosities in the law that have divided us? His word could have been given to us in such a way that that didn't exist. But it's not essential for us to resolve those problems. What's essential is for us to learn to live with them, and learn to honor one another and go on with the great and mighty work of the Lord brought forth. He will not take away all those things. Even when He comes, there will still be those that He will have to say, "I see you have been disputing about certain parts of my law." I am sure that he will task us about that, but He isn't going to take the issues away from us. He will let us go on with the disputing.

We have some images that I would find in the Scriptures that I think are important. There are some warrior images, and this is the day when we recognize those men and women who have stood for the security and the liberty of our country. There is a Scriptures that says

“Let the trump give an uncertain sound who will prepare himself for the battle,”

I have often thought about that. In fact I have talked about Gideon’s army, and the time when trumpets were used to rout an army. We find that story told in the Scriptures, how Gideon took his army and thinned it down, and thinned it down, until he had but 300 young men. He sent them out to surround the enemy at night with nothing more than a light and a trumpet in their hands. He asked those young men who surrounded that great army that was about to destroy Israel to turn on the light, break the jug and reveal the light, and blow the trumpet and cry out the sword of the Lord. That small body of men routed a great army. That small body of men had to know what it meant to blow a certain sound. A little, tiny squeaky quaver out of that trumpet wouldn’t have done the job. The way that I blow a trumpet wouldn’t have worked. We need to have men who are capable of making that certain sound. They were warriors and they went forth and they did that.

So blowing the trumpet in Zion, a quote from the Scriptures, blow the trumpet in Zion and call a solemn assembly found in Joel, is something that we have done. We have called a solemn assembly here. We have, I believe, blown the trumpet. It needs to have a certainty in its sound. In that certainty we need to acknowledge that we are at war. We are in a battle. Our president right now is having trouble convincing the American public that there is a real war out here. And I think sometimes we have the same problem inside the church trying to recognize that we are really involved in a war. We have been called to establish the beachhead where the kingdom of God takes its invasion in this world. You are sitting on the shores of D-Day already. We need to hold the high ground. We are to hold that ground for the Lord and for his kingdom.

We have got soldiers sometimes that are at work in the world (in the church) who are aware, I guess, of the battle, but their way of trying to advance their cause is to shoot other soldiers in the back. That’s not how you deal with the tension of warfare. There is tension in an army, isn’t there? Those of you who have served in the military, isn’t it true that you grouse about the food, you grouse about the superior officers, and you grouse about the orders and you can feel tension and upset about that? Especially when you are commanded to go into battle, there are a lot of questions about whether this is the right place, and the right time, and it is really right for me to put my life on the line, and should I follow that particular cowardly officer or not, or that person or this person? And yet, a good soldier when he’s faced with those alternatives, goes into battle doesn’t take a pot shot at the sergeant. He doesn’t join the enemy. He recognizes that the enemy is on the other side of the trench.

In our own efforts here, we have decided lots of times that we are going to make the army stronger by shooting some of the generals. I don’t think that God is very pleased with that. I

think he smites his forehead and says, “What happened to that rule about forgive seventy times seven, or love your enemies, or even, love your neighbors. What happened to that? What happened to the fundamental commandments? What happened to the basic discipline of the army? We are at war, but the war is out there. We are called to be in the world, but not of it. We are called to be transformers of the world. There are stresses inside of the church because the world is invading us. We are not trying to stop it. We need to be doing some things about that.

We have cultural invasion in our own country, and our own culture right inside of the church. We had it when I was a young man. We had arguments when I was a boy about how long your hair could be. I think that probably the most angry I ever saw my father was over a haircut. The one he wanted to give me, and the one I wouldn’t let him give. When I was a school teacher, it was about miniskirts. Later on about rings in the ears with boys, and bare midriffs now and tattoos and those kinds of things that young people are using as a kind of identifiers that they are part of a culture that is not our culture. They are saying in effect, It’s not the Lord’s culture, it’s not the grown-ups culture, it belongs to us.

I can add activities—all kinds of them. Things that are not of the kingdom of God that need to stop. There are agendas for what we call fun and entertainment and they affect the seniors as well as the juniors. There are practices that we need to look at. The Lord announced them and condemned them. They had to do with prevarication, with lying, with telling things that are not true, with cursing, with taking the name of the Lord in vain, or using profanities or obscenities. It has to do with agendas with fun—perversions of our sexual codes. We have become pretty lax and tolerant about these things. We say, “Well, they are just young people.” “Well, it is just the sort of thing that is going on today.” “Well, you know we need to be forgiving.” But we need to understand that we are at war and these are casualties in the battle. We have been wounded by the enemy when those kinds of things happen, and we need to heal up from it. We need to look to the Lord for that kind of strength. We need to take seriously the fact that the Lord wanted to do his marvelous work in the world. It is not enough to understand that men are capable of doing marvelous and interesting things, but it’s for the glory of the Lord and not for the glory of men.

There are tensions about the name of the church. What do we call ourselves? Who are we? How are we going to deal with that? Are we going to snap the strings—twang, and separate? Then the instrument won’t play at all. Am I right? Or do we live with that kind of tension until the Lord puts his bow and plays the song, and then we understand what that tension was all about.

I don’t have a lot of minutes to share with you. There are a lot of things on my heart to share. There are analogies that swim in my mind about this. I think of the sun, the great ball of fire that lights us every day that God put in the heavens. I think of the intrinsic symbolism that’s there with respect to tension. You know the sun has this enormous gravity. It’s holding Pluto in an orbit that’s a billion miles from the sun. Still the power of the sun reaches out and captures that planet and makes it swing around itself. That great attractiveness, that gravity—wants to call eve-

rything down into the center of the sun. It wants to drag you there, it wants to drag the earth there, it wants to get everything and feed it into that center.

Remember that I said that the gospel of the kingdom has two poles to it. It is polarized. It has a tension that pulls everything to the center. It has another tension that says that everything should go out—that what we gather up, should be sent out. You know the sun does that. It uses that great, enormous, attractive pulling power of gravity to compress the elements that are part of the sun until they become plasmic and until they are heated to the point where fusion ignition takes place and the star bursts into light. It explodes as it were. It doesn't fly apart because gravity keeps it from flying apart but within its heart is kindled a fire and that fire begins to radiate out and the outward pressure of that fire balances the inward drag of gravity until the sun radiates its light into all the universe, to everyone, in harmony and in balance with its own law of gravity.

Part of the tension that you and I experience is that the Seventy are telling you that we need to go into all the world. Look at the thousands of people that the Lord is putting in front of us and saying, "Here they are. Are you going to send the resources, the men, the personnel, the message, to reach out and save these people? Will you add them to my great and marvelous work? Will they rest with you in my Father's kingdom?" On the other hand He says, "Are you going to be the cause of my Zion? Are you going to get traction from that idea? Are you going to obey the law, the financial law, the gathering law?" Are we going to start looking seriously at the issues that make us a people, a culture, together, united as representatives of his kingdom on this earth. Are we going to be a disciplined army holding the beachhead for the Lord or not? We have to get traction with those two ideas here. There is an enormous tension in that. I understand that.

We have to be analogous to the sun. We have to use that great power that attracts to the center and brings in resources from all over, and then let it kindle. We have got to ignite. We have got to burn. We have got to be transformed. There has to come a day when the Spirit of God rests upon us and takes us out of our daily walk and makes us understand that we are called to live a different kind of life. We are engaged as an army is engaged in a war. We are engulfed as a people who are given an Angelic Message to declare what the heavens already understand, that the kingdom of God is the future, and outside of it there isn't any future. All of the glory of man is, as the prophet said, like grass that fades and withers and will be put in the oven to be burned up. Where will we be when that day comes? Scrambling trying to find the 'ark'? Will we be trying to get to the place of salvation? Shall we be the ones trying to come back into the kingdom with tears and weeping and saying, well, maybe we should have been obedient to the law. Maybe we should have listened to the commandments of the Lord a little more.

There is some indication in the Scriptures that there is a time when it is just too late—when the wheel of opportunity has passed us by. It is hard to believe that, you know. I had that experience when I was a little boy. I was about seven or eight years old, and I loved to swim. I grew up on the Island of Aruba and I learned to swim at a very early age. I wasn't afraid of the water, but I hated cold water. My mother and father and my younger brother, brave souls that they were, went out on a picnic in Costa Rica. To get to that picnic, they had to walk across an ice

cold river. It wasn't very large, but it was very cold. They all went and they sat on a big flat rock and prepared the picnic lunch. I kept going down and putting my finger in the cold water. And you know it was one of those days when the older son was just being stubborn. So I decided that I was not going to cross that water, it was just too cold; and if I pitched a big enough fit daddy would carry me over there, or they would come and find a rock on my side of the river and we would eat together. And you know what happened? Mom and daddy left me sitting on my rock on that shore, and they had a lovely lunch. Finally as the last piece cake was going away, I decided that I was going to cross that river and I started across that river, and daddy said, "Don't bother. We are leaving." I didn't have to cross the river, but I got no lunch. Somehow that stuck in my mind. It was a good lesson.

I apply it tonight to some of the things that I am talking about. There is tendency to believe that if we just sit here and keep talking to the Lord, He will finally come over on our side of the river and we will get that last piece of cake, anyway. That won't happen. We are going to have to walk in that river. It's cold. It's difficult. There is some tension involved there. There may be something that is disquieting. We may at times be uncomfortable with what happens, but we need to understand what fidelity means, and what it is that we are faithful to. I am calling for you and for me to raise the level of our conversation from the petty kinds of divisive things that fracture the concrete to the larger issues of where the appropriate tensions are to be applied and how to balance them so that we can both ignite and still have the gravity. How we can both be strong and still have that tension inside—hidden, covered up under that structural concrete—but still tense. How we can tune this lyre, the instrument, until God can play it with the kind of musical passion and power that this people were designed to be able to express to the world.

What is our choice? What are we going to do? What will be different if we leave here? Will there be anything different? Will we say, "Oh Brother Simmons preached an interesting sermon. I don't know that I understood it a lot. He was talking about centrifugal and centripetal forces, and sun, and musical instruments. It was kind of confusing to me."

When we walk out of here and go back to the world to go back to the activities where we have been involved, are we going to look at this conference as a benchmark? Where the church finally looked at itself and said, "For heaven sake let's get traction with the idea of building the kingdom of God and let's get serious about using resources to get into the world and preach the gospel of the kingdom."

Brothers and Sisters, the time is late, and there may only be one piece of cake left. My time here is gone, but this is your time and it is beginning.