

Report on Missionary Efforts in South America

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I desire, my brethren and sisters, to read a few verses from the 26th chapter of II Nephi, beginning with the 23rd verse, as follows:

THE GOSPEL UNIVERSAL

"For behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you that the Lord worketh not in darkness.

"He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation.

"Behold, doth he cry unto any, saying: Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but he saith: Come unto me all ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money and without price.

"Behold, hath he commanded any that they should depart out of the synagogues, or out of the houses of worship? Behold, I say unto you, Nay.

"Hath he commanded any that they should, not partake of his salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for all men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance.

"Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the ether, and none are forbidden."

I read now from the 33rd verse:

"For the Lord doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile."

A BETTER UNDERSTANDING

It has been my privilege in association with my companions, Brothers Rulon S. Wells and Rey L. Pratt, during the past year to come to a better understanding of the Lord's feeling towards his sons and daughters, as expressed in this scripture that I have just read to you. As you have heard, we were assigned to go as the first missionaries of the Church to South America.

FIRST MISSIONARY VISIT IN SOUTH AMERICA

However, you students of our history will remember that Brother Parley P. Pratt made a visit to the west coast of that

country about seventy years ago. He remained for a few months, until his means were exhausted, struggling with the Spanish language. He was not so fortunate as we were, because we had his grandson, Brother Rey L. Pratt, who is a master of the Spanish language. That enabled us to do a work that Brother Parley was unable to do. Then I am also sure that there has been going forward in South America, in these last seventy years, a marvelous change that was necessary to prepare the hearts of the people and the governments for the coming of the gospel message. We knew, however, that it was not going to be easy, but we were willing to go to the ends of the earth, to make any kind of sacrifice, to discharge the great obligation which the Lord has placed upon his Church, to bring to all men the glad news that he has spoken again, and has established his Church in the earth, that all flesh, black and white, bond and free, Jew and Gentile, all may know of these good things which the Lord has done.

We took a long journey into that south land—and, by the way, there were some who wondered why we did not go to San Francisco and sail to South America from that point, but if you will look up the map and draw a line straight south from New York City, your line will carry you about two hundred miles west of Valparaiso, on the coast of Chile. So practically all of South America lies east of New York City. We sailed from New York City on the 14th day of November, and after six days and six nights we reached one of the islands of the West Indies. We felt sure that we were a long distance from home. We might have been in Europe by that time. Then we sailed nine days and nine nights without seeing land, and then found ourselves opposite the eastern point of South America, and not many hundred miles west of the British Isles. Then three days more and we were into the harbor at Rio de Janeiro, off the coast of Brazil. Then five days more and we reached our destination at Buenos Aires, the great southern capital, a city of two million two hundred fifty thousand people. I said to some of the brethren that it was a strange experience as we passed out of New York City in a cold winter's wind, to go into the balmy summer climate of South America, where summer there is winter here; to pass under the equator and have the sun move off to the north and arise in the northeast and set in the northwest and the moon to follow likewise; and all the stars we knew to disappear, and a new heaven and a new earth came into view, for it was a different kind of earth from ours, different vegetation, climate, people, and to me a different language, until I felt like one entirely removed from the world I knew. I am grateful, that we had Brother Pratt's

assistance in speaking the Spanish; and Brother Wells' assistance in speaking the German, for we had two families of German-speaking people in Buenos Aires who had joined the Church in Germany. With Brother Wells' assistance we succeeded in carrying the work forward among the German-speaking people of that section, and before Brother Wells had to return it was our privilege to take six of them into the waters of baptism, the first converts baptized in South America. Brother Wells' return was a great sorrow to us because of his companionship and his knowledge of the German language, but his illness was such, and it continued to recur, that we felt his life was in danger. He was an exceedingly sick man, and yet Brother Wells would have been glad to have stayed there and laid down his life. It was a great disappointment to us to have him go home, but it was necessary, and he was willing to respond to the suggestion and as cheerfully go as to stay.

Then Brother Pratt and myself continued our work with the German people as best we could, but it was difficult. I had to tell Brother Pratt in English what to tell them, and he told it in the Spanish to a German girl who could speak a little Spanish. She interpreted it in German to our friends, and the answer came back in the same grapevine way. But we were successful in holding them and in increasing interest among others until our little group grew. When Brother Stooft reached us, being a master of the German language, he was able to take up that work and push it forward, so that it is in a very prosperous condition today. There are a number of others who have become interested.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

The principal work that Brother Pratt and myself undertook was among the Spanish-speaking people, and I would like you to know that Spanish is the language of South America. While there are here and there small groups of English and small groups of German-speaking people, practically all of them speak Spanish. So that one is as helpless down there without Spanish as he would be in the United States without English. We undertook to secure a hall, but there were no halls such as we have in this country.

Conditions are different. When we did try to rent some of them, we could not secure them because they were recreation halls, and the chief activities were going forward on Sunday night, and they did not wish a religious service to disturb them. So for two months we battled with that problem. We tried to rent office quarters to make halls out of them, but were unsuccessful.

At last we did secure a place and rented all of it, a store and living quarters, and then we began to invite people to come. In the meantime, however, we had gone to our friends who live in the suburbs or outskirts of the city. That was not

the easiest work to do, because we traveled two hours on the street car and then walked two miles, not on paved streets, but on lanes, through fields, in mud, in dust, and all character of weather, and then when we did this all we could get to come to our meetings, for nearly two months, were children.

"A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM"

There was no prejudice against us, in fact the great majority of the people did not even know there was a United States of North America or anything about it, much less did they know anything about the "Mormon" Church. The chief lack of interest was because we were not Catholic. The whole country is Catholic, as you know. Nevertheless we said: "We shall not abandon our effort to reach the people." And we learned anew that "a little child shall lead them." We continued with those children, teaching them to sing, teaching them to pray, to repeat the Lord's prayer, the Articles of Faith, and the Ten Commandments. They carried these prayers and songs into their homes, and then one parent appeared, and another, and another, and we finally organized a group meeting of adults, and continued to teach the children. The children brought their parents—and that was true in several places that had opened for us. Then we moved forward into homes of those who had become interested, and to our great joy we saw that the same wonderful response was being manifest in the hearts of the people of that land as elsewhere, and a splendid Spanish woman, came forward and signified her absolute conviction that we had brought the truth. She resisted all kinds of opposition that was arrayed against her, and it was our privilege to bring her into the fold of Christ. I want to bear witness that there is not in the Church anywhere a more devoted, faithful Latter-day Saint than Sister Sifuentes, in the city of Buenos Aires. I am therefore moved to say that I do believe that the Lord is no respecter of persons or of nations, and that all who will receive him and his message shall likewise have equal privileges in his blessed gospel. She became an active and energetic missionary.

ITALIANS INTERESTED IN THE RESTORED GOSPEL

Then some Italians became interested. There are two million of them in the Republic of Argentina. When our assistants came, Brother Stooft and his wife, Brother Sharp and Brother Stoddard, splendid workers, we introduced them into those places where we had started meetings, and our largest group increased until we had an average attendance of about sixty adults. We left them with places for meetings every night in the week, except Saturday night, and three places on Sunday. We left a small group converted, for eleven of them signified to us their intention of joining the Church and bore testimony to the truth of the message we had brought them. When we finally did leave, there were as many

tears shed at our departure in Buenos Aires as there had been in Salt Lake City when we left here a year ago. Since leaving that land four splendid Italians, three men and a woman, have joined the Church, and others in addition to the eleven that I have referred to have become interested.

It was a long, hard fight for us. I have no word of censure for the people. They had prejudices against the religion we were advocating because it was not Catholic. We were foreigners and strangers to them. But I rejoice in saying to you, my brethren and sisters, that God was good to us and he opened the door so that ultimately we had the privilege of laying the foundation of the Church in that land, and from a membership of four adults, when we reached that land, we have left twenty-four Latter-day Saints, with the work started in those three languages. We met no opposition, as far as the government is concerned, notwithstanding there is a union of church and state in all the South American republics, save Chile. There was a separation of church and state in Chile a year ago. Yet there is religious liberty in all those countries for our missionary work.

A DIFFICULT MISSIONARY WORK

I found great difficulty in fully satisfying myself, because of my inability to preach the gospel to them through not knowing their language; however, I learned to read it and converse with the people. I satisfied myself in part, however, by assisting in the splendid work that Brother Pratt was performing, by inviting the people to our meetings, and having him translate into Spanish the testimony I wanted to bear to the people of that land. I had the privilege of visiting twelve thousand five hundred homes, giving them this printed message and inviting the people to our meetings. We held two hundred thirty-four meetings, so that Brother Pratt was very busy preaching to the people. We enjoyed the experience, although we had to do things just like we did when we started out in the commencement of our missionary work, like we did when we traveled without purse or scrip. It was the most difficult piece of missionary work that I have undertaken, but I thank the Lord that success has come out of it, that a foundation has been laid, and I am convinced that it is possible for the gospel to be carried to all the people of that land.

VISIT TO THE INDIANS ON THE GREAT ANDES PLATEAU

It was our privilege, through the permission of the Presidency, to return via the West coast. We were anxious not to go away from South America until we had seen the Indians of that land. So in the Northern part of the Argentina we met them, hundreds of thousands of them. We passed up to the plateau of the great Andes mountains, a plateau five hundred miles long by a hundred and fifty miles wide, at an elevation of twelve thousand feet, inhabited by Indians. We lived for

some three weeks with them, slept in their houses, ate at their tables, saw millions of them. There are two million eight hundred sixty thousand people in the Republic of Bolivia, nearly two million of them being pure-blood Indians. There are four million six hundred twenty thousand people in Peru, and more than three million and a half of them are pure-blood Indians. There are two classes of Indians. One is the half-breed, a descendant of the Spanish soldier, and the majority of the leaders of South American countries have Indian blood in them, but unfortunately they do not esteem that Indian blood, but are rather more proud of their Spanish blood. Not until the day shall come when they come to an understanding of who they are, and that the Indian blood is of Israel and is of the best blood in the world, will their hearts turn in sympathy and love to the downtrodden and oppressed of their own brothers and sisters, the full-blood Indians.

CONDITION OF THE SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS

I have never seen a more industrious, hard-working lot of people in my life than the millions of Indians we saw in Bolivia and Peru. My heart went out to them in anxious desire, for I saw them as they are in Mexico, in poverty, robbed of their lands and their glorious civilization, a much better civilization than was brought by Pizarro. A better civilization than they have in those countries was destroyed ruthlessly, and they were murdered, and their lands taken. They were despoiled and have been trodden down and have remained very largely in a state of semi-slavery until today. With all their toil and labor they ought to be a rich and independent people, if they could only have the returns that come from their labor. But the majority of the returns are taken by the land holders, for fifteen per cent of the men in South America own ninety-five per cent of the land, and these conditions have obtained for many years, until they are in a state of poverty, and yet they are in the majority in many of those countries. But the right of suffrage is only extended to those who can read and write, and the majority of the Indians cannot read or write. Few schools are provided for them to learn to read and write, and they are like a great sleeping giant. Many of them speak the Spanish language. So Brother Pratt and I cannot see why the missionary work shall not quickly come unto them.

THE DAY OF THE INDIANS' REDEMPTION DRAWING NIGH

It was our privilege to call on the government officials of both Bolivia and Peru, and to explain our mission and desire to have missionaries go to those lands. We were assured that our missionaries would be welcome, and that there would be no objection on the part of the Government. It is our desire that those precious promises made to their forefathers shall be fulfilled. They shall pass through the same changes that are going forward in Mexico, but they shall come out of their serfdom and bondage into the light of freedom in religion, as

well as in political matters, and the day of retribution and their redemption, I am sure, is not far distant.

SPAIN AND ITALY ENTITLED TO HEAR THE GOSPEL

I desire to bear testimony to what President Ivins said here this morning. I believe that the beginning of this gospel dispensation, as set forth in one of these revelations, was the commencement of the times of the Gentiles. I believe that that generation which saw the dawn of this gospel dispensation shall not pass away until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled, and after the days of the Gentiles cometh the day of Israel. I am anxious, therefore, that in the period which yet remains to the Gentile nations to hear the gospel message, we shall send forth the help necessary, not only to those South American countries, but my soul has been turned towards Spain, since I have been in that South land, and also toward Italy. I do not feel we are justified in the opportunity we have given to either Spain or Italy or France or China or to other nations to hear the gospel; so I am looking forward for the time to come in the very near future when those lands shall be fully given the opportunity. Not many of them may come into the fold, and yet I believe that there is some of the blood of Israel in Spain and in Italy, and that the people are entitled to the opportunity of hearing the gospel before the day of judgment shall come. I bear witness to you that the Lord is already beginning the work for the redemption of the house of Israel.

THE GOSPEL TO DELIVER THE CHILDREN OF FATHER LEHI FROM BONDAGE

God gave us the Book of Mormon and the chief reason, as set forth in one of the revelations, is that it shall be the means of bringing to the descendants of Father Lehi the knowledge of the Redeemer of the world, and to establish them in the faith of their fathers. I bear witness to you that nothing on earth shall ever bring them out of their thralldom [sic] save the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I rejoice, therefore, that the day dawn is breaking, the night is dispelling and the day of their redemption cometh. I have wept over them, as I have seen them dwelling in ignorance and poverty in the midst of the ruins of great and glorious cities their fathers built. Such ruins I have never seen elsewhere of mighty temples and cities, the evidence of their past wonderful civilization; and then, as I looked upon these poor, wretched souls who have reached their state of degradation [sic], of poverty and misery, through sin, transgression and oppression, I have prayed to God to bring to pass their deliverance according to his promises, and I feel sure that that day is at hand. May the Lord put it into the hearts of men and women to continue to respond and carry the gospel message wherever it is wanted, and discharge the mighty responsibility that rests upon this Church before the day of judgment shall come, that the

Gentile dispensation, when it comes to a close, will find us having discharged our obligation; then cometh the day of Israel, the day of her redemption in all lands. I bear witness to you that swiftly moving events are at our very doors. I bear witness that God is crying repentance to the world in the testimonies of thunder, of lightning and tempests, and if they do not repent he will thresh the nations.

THE TASK AND DUTY OF THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

There is no safety, so far as the Latter-day Saints are concerned, only by keeping the commandments of God. As I looked at the Church from the distance of eleven thousand miles, I admired what we have done in subduing the desert and making it blossom like the rose, building our temples, tabernacles, and factories; but rising above them all and more splendid and glorious than all else is the manhood and the womanhood that has been established in the earth by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is the biggest thing we have done, and may God help us to use all we have or may possess as but a means to the glorious end of establishing here a civilization the like of which the world does not know; that they may come from the East and the West, from the North and the South, to learn of our ways and to walk in our paths. It is our task to perfect the lives of these men and women, boys and girls, until they shall be the light of the world, the salt of the earth. God give us the vision to see it, to work until we shall be successful, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.