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SERMON BY ELDER R. M. ELVIN,

At Lamoni, Iowa, May 21, 1893.

Subject, ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN.

"FOR though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you."—1 Cor. 9: 19-23.

I understand that the chief object of the church and her ministers is to present the gospel of Christ, to preach it to the world. This minister from whom we have read is a favorite one to draw lessons from.

I have read this portion of Scripture many times, and have studied how it were possible to put myself in harmony with the instruction that is here given. Since I accepted an ordination the chief desire of my heart has been to accomplish all the good I could in bringing people to a knowledge of the truth. The obstacles in the way are very numerous and differ greatly. In one place we meet with phases of opposition on account of the ignorance of the people, quite different from what is met in other places. Ever since I united with the church I have been acquainted with people who, so far as morality and in-

tegrity of purpose in their worship are concerned are just as good as could be found; yet they are not members of this church. They are those people whom we call good; and how to reach them has been a study. They have no thought of neglecting their own places of worship; they find no fault with us in our form of worship, and in consequence of this it is a question of importance how this class of people can be reached. Nothing can be brought against their characters, because they are good people, such as we would be glad to see accept the gospel because they would become useful, for they give evidence of good desires in all their actions. I have met in my experiences so many varied phases of life, that really I have been puzzled as to how to reach each of them; how to awaken in their hearts a desire to understand the gospel in its purity.

We go into a neighborhood, commence preaching, and hold conversation with those who subsequently accept the gospel. They quickly tell us that they are satisfied with their religion; they are satisfied with the gospel as they understand it; they do not care to be disturbed; they have no anxiety whatever with regard to what we are preaching. And, as one man told me a short time ago, "I heard there was a Mormon preacher holding forth at the opera house, but I had no interest in what he was preaching, and I did not understand why the people permitted him to preach." He did not want to take the responsibility of having the preaching stopped, as he

did not care about it himself; so it progressed and did not stop. By and by he was drawn out to attend a funeral sermon, and he heard something that disturbed his mind, and he could not keep away; he came again and again, and continued coming, so that through a series of forty sermons he hardly missed one. Then he was surprised that people did not all come to hear; he was surprised that people could hear such preaching in their midst and not improve the opportunity to accept that which was presented to them in the gospel. It was purely accidental that his attention was called to the gospel, and those related to him by the ties of nature could see no reason why he should be attracted by it.

I believe I have studied more earnestly how to reach a certain class of people in Nebraska than the people of any other place. The majority of them are Bohemians; a great many are religious and are good neighbors. As a rule, they are very kind to each other, and have some characteristics that would be of advantage to other people; they stick close to each other. It is said in that locality, that a Bohemian coming without money enough to buy a meal of victuals, will soon be able to buy a farm and pay for it. We are aware that he could not buy it with his own money, but his friends always see to it that they never lose anything. That is to be admired in them. They are a prudent people, and they are faithful in their dealings with each other.

How to reach them has worried the minds of more than the Latter Day Saints. The matter was carried up to the Methodist conference by the minister of that locality who asked for advice how they might be reached. When I tell you of some of their ways

of life you will discover why it is so hard to reach them. They will go into town on Saturday, and, perhaps, will stay all Saturday night—and they are faithful to the church they belong to—and when they come home they invariably bring one, and perhaps two, kegs of beer in the back end of the wagon. They think there is nothing wrong in this; it has been implanted in their hearts in the fatherland, and because of their education they do not think there is a particle of wrong in it. On Saturdays you will find the whole family going into town, and a saloon is the first place they stop at; they all go in and drink together, after that you will find them sitting around a table eating with beer before them; and they think nothing wrong of it, while it is a matter of surprise to those not so educated to see men, women, and children promiscuously assembled together eating and drinking in the manner described. I understand that the gospel, as understood by the religious world, has been presented to them by a great many individuals; but I am not aware, in all the preaching that has been done in that locality by all the different denominations who have been represented, that there has ever been a Bohemian who was born and received his first education in the old country converted to any faith of the Protestant religion. I know of only one Protestant church to which any of this people belong; viz., the Lutheran; and that church was established in the land of their fathers. Now, how to go to preach to this people whether in this, or in their native land, and become all things to all men that we might gain men to Christ, is a question that has forced itself upon my mind. I am aware, and this congregation is aware,

that should I go into a saloon in that town and drink beer with the people, I would not be allowed to represent this church; my license would be called for, and I would not be permitted to preach. How am I to be all things to all men? I don't know what to do in this case. I could not be a Bohemian, and as a consequence have had no success with them. We know of none of that nation that have been baptized into this church, except it might be some of their children. We cannot make the gospel a success in reaching that people.

When I study the condition into which humanity has fallen, and read and study the lessons that are offered to us by General Booth of the Salvation Army, and stand in the midst of his followers in the streets and listen to what they have to say, and see how they try to persuade men to come to Christ, I wonder if I ever could adapt myself to the condition that surrounds me. I confess to you that I could not become a Salvationist to bring men and women to Christ. I could not bear to have the gospel of Jesus Christ, as I have learned it, prostituted in that manner; I could not hail people in the streets, nor enter dives and dens of infamy, nor go into saloons where wretchedness and squalor are found that I might gain some for Christ.

I have been confronted by some of these conditions. I remember, while laboring in St. Louis some years ago, visiting from house to house, picking my way through the dirty alleys, climbing up rickety stairs at the back of the buildings, and finding in the dark rooms individuals who had read of the restored gospel. I remember going to those whom I found in absolute poverty, who had not a chair in the house, nor a stove to cook their

food, and they sat down to eat in the middle of the floor by the only box there was, and there were neither cups, nor knives, nor forks enough to go around. And yet, these people were not mean; they were ready to divide the last morsel, and seemed reconciled to their condition. I have seen all this, and yet, I have not seen the last stages of degradation to which humanity has fallen; some of my brethren may have witnessed them while laboring in large cities. Paul says here that while preaching, the object he had for Christ's sake was that he might be partaker with those that received the gospel, and bring them to a knowledge of the truth. It is clearly evident, as he says, that he was free, and yet enjoying that freedom he was willing to subject himself to certain phases of life that he might gain more for Christ. And well might he present that thought when he understood that Jesus Christ came to this world for the express purpose of bringing about salvation to every man who would receive the truth. How can a man be saved by the gospel unless it be brought to him? How can men hear it in our great cities? I am satisfied that the lower classes, prevalent there, cannot go to the churches opened for worship. They have not the standing wherewith to be admitted, nor the means by which they may be rendered acceptable to those who have charge of those churches.

A circumstance comes forcibly to my mind, of a revival meeting that a faithful minister was holding in the city from which I moved to this place. He had baptized quite a number there when the trustees waited upon him and said, "This must be stopped; for among all those whom you have baptized into the church there is not one

dollar to help the church. We want money to help us; we are financially embarrassed, and we want you to make converts who will help us financially; those you are receiving are no help to us. And the revival had to stop. I remember holding conversation with a young man whom I knew, who represented no church, but was acting the part of an evangelist in the city of Omaha. He held meetings in an old store building on the flats on the Missouri River, and the individuals who were gathered there were never found in a house of worship in the city. He tried to awaken them to a sense of their position before God, but as soon as he had done speaking they began lighting their pipes, and went out of the door cursing and swearing. It is hard to labor for those who do not appreciate the sacrifice that is being made in order that they might be brought to a knowledge of the truth. Paul says, "Unto the Jews I became as a Jew." I cannot play the hypocrite. If I was to go to a Jewish synagogue, I could not be a Jew; I might study Jewish history, but I could not be a Jew in the full sense of the term, so that I could gain them to Christ, or represent to them him whom they would spurn from them. Paul further states, that when he went to them that were under the law he represented himself as being under the law, and when he went to those who had not the law, he confesses that he made himself one with them. I confess that this I am not able to do. When I go into a neighborhood I study the peculiar characteristics of the people; I try to adapt myself to their condition; I try to make my preaching so plain that they may understand me; I try to use the same language that they do; I try to use the most commonplace illustra-

tions that are found among them.

It was my misfortune, once, to be left with a man who was celebrating his sixty-third birthday, and his manner of celebrating was to take something to warm up the spirit, and by night I thought he got pretty well warmed up. Every time he drank he wanted me to drink with him, and when I would not drink with him he wanted me to smell his breath, or so it seemed, every time that he drank. He wanted to talk religion, too, and the more he drank the more he wanted to talk religion; and finally when bedtime came he asked me to pray for him. I confess that I was embarrassed. I turned to him and said, "Do you want me to pray for you?" and he said he wanted me to be sure and do it. And when he had got down he said, "See. Elvin, I am on my marrow bones." I knelt down and prayed earnestly for him as best I could, for his wife, who was a devoted member of the church; I prayed for myself, that I might endure such a cross—for I confess it is a cross for me to be in company with anyone who is addicted to the use of tobacco, much more with those who use intoxicants. When I got through praying he said, "That was well done." The next morning he was sobered off, and he said to me, "I am going to hear you preach." That man sat there under the preaching and cried like a child, and he accepted what I was preaching. I confess that one of the questions ever before me is, How can I accommodate myself to such people and preserve the purity of life and the dignity of a minister of Christ, and yet reach the hearts of the people that they may be brought to Christ? For years this thought has been with me, How can I ingratiate myself into the good will of the congregations that the individuals

I am preaching to will have confidence in the preaching so that I can be able to advance them in the ways of life?

Paul further says, "To the weak became I as weak." Now, I believe I can do that. I might make myself weak, I believe I can, and that weakness comes by the clothing that Christ furnishes. It is not natural for me to be meek; it is not natural for me to be humble; I am proud, proud as Lucifer, and I know it is a constant stumbling-stone to me. I am not naturally religious; I am religious because my judgment says it is best; I am religious because my judgment confesses that that which God has given through Jesus Christ, is for my advantage here and hereafter. And yet, there are brethren and sisters and neighbors with whom I have associated, to whom it is perfectly natural to be religious, humble, meek; and I have looked at them and studied their characters, their lives, and I have admired them; and it has been a source of wonder that such should be the case; that every day they are devoted to God; that mildness is on their tongues; that peace is in their hearts; that affection to God is constantly before their eyes; while, to me, it is a matter of duty, a condition that I must force myself into because I realize it is for the best. Perhaps it is a good thing for some that they can understand where their weakness is, but to become weak in the sense of the gospel I understand to be something in advance of that. I understand that it is hard to accommodate ourselves to the knowledge and understanding of a child; but when I preach so that a child can understand me, the older ones will certainly understand.

I am reminded here of the story of two brothers; one was what they call a "Hardshell Baptist;" he was fixed

and satisfied with the choice he had made. He wanted no one to say a word to him about his religion. He had no idea or calculation of changing it. His younger brother drifted away from home and settled in California, where he accepted the faith of the Christian Church. Years afterwards he became a minister of the Christian Church, and returned to Delaware, where he visited his elder brother who was so firmly fixed in his religion. At night the Bible was brought out, a chapter was read, and prayer was offered. The next morning the younger one commenced to talk to his brother about his worship. The elder brother said, "I am established; I don't want to hear anything that is contrary to my faith." But the younger brother was a persistent man and desired to instruct his brother in the Christian faith; but the older one refused to listen and said, "I don't want to know anything of your newfangled doctrine; I am satisfied with what I am; I don't want to change." The younger kept on till, finally, the older one got angry and went to the house. His little boy had been standing by listening to the conversation of the two brothers. A few days afterwards his father had occasion to take Jack, the mule, into the lot to move some things out of the way, and having hitched Jack to a good sized log, Jack refused to go; instead of going forward he pulled backward. The old man whipped him and did everything to make the mule pull, but the mule was obstinate. The little boy, looking on, said to his father, "Papa, I know what is the matter with Jack." The father said, "What is it?" The boy said, "Why, he is established." When we become so established in our views that we refuse to receive any more light, we are acting contrary to

the character and principles inculcated in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I believe that every day, every hour, we should be learning useful lessons as devoted followers of Jesus Christ in the acquirement of knowledge, that a better understanding of that which will lift us higher in the scale of intelligence may be given, so that we may be better able to reach those individuals and thus shed light and understanding upon their pathway.

I have selected a few quotations that are in harmony with the text I have taken. One of them is in the Book of Mormon, page 113, being a statement of one of the sons of Lehi, and it is to that work of the ministry of which he is speaking that we are trying to direct your attention this morning. He says: "And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads, if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our mights, their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise, their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day." There is some importance in that simple statement made by this minister. He realized the condition in which he was placed; and he who realizes as he realized, if he possesses the Spirit that he possessed, will appreciate the importance of magnifying his calling; of becoming all things to all men that he may gain the more to Christ; of teaching and preaching the law that he may free himself from the blood of this generation; he will be impressed with the importance of bringing every possible means to bear upon them that they may realize their situation and surroundings in order that they may

be saved, and that he may be found spotless at the last day when he shall stand to receive his judgment after making his final report to the head of the church which is Jesus Christ. I understand that it must be kept in memory as we pass along, from day to day, that in preaching the gospel, in carrying out its principles, the new covenant of the church, that no part of it should be so presented or advocated that it will clash with any other part; but that there should be kept a certain equilibrium, that all may be harmonious when the record shall be made up, and agree with the statement here in the Book of Mormon which stands as a constant witness as to how we should labor, that at the great day we may be comforted with the thought that we have presented the word of Christ as it is in him. In Luke 19:10 we find a statement concerning the work of Christ, which I apprehend should be to a certain extent our work as far as we are able to labor: "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." It is one thing, brethren, for us to preach when the congregation comes together, but that is not seeking the people in the sense that is here presented. According to my understanding, to seek them we must go where they are; we must try to awaken in their hearts a righteous desire to hear, we must teach them that the gospel we present is to save them. That was the work of Christ when he was here.

He went on the highways, in the byways, in the market places, in the houses, in the synagogues, or wherever the people were; on the sea or on the land, we find that the Son of God was constantly preaching,—preaching, not as we preach to assemblies at set hours, but as it was at the

well to the woman who was drawing water,—wherever he could find one of those he came to seek and save. I understand that in that spirit and in that only we shall be trying to seek and to save those with whom we come in contact; that our lives and conversation should be such as will attract attention. I remember when riding in the cars last winter, an old lady said to me, “You are a minister!” I said to her, “How do you know that? She said, “By your looks, and by the way you came in the cars and sat down.” I don’t know why an individual should take me to be a minister when there are those of our common acquaintances who say, “I would never take you for a minister.” But in talking with this lady for about an hour, she accepted what I said; I gave her some tracts and she promised to investigate the matter. It was a word spoken at the proper time, and I don’t think that such acts as take place in our daily lives and cannot be reported at the General Conference will be forgotten by the great Judge in the day of accounts. In Matthew 9: 12, 13 we have a reason assigned for this mission work of Christ: “But when Jesus heard that [Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?], he said unto them, they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” This statement was made by the Savior as a reason for the preaching of the gospel.

I suppose the class of individuals spoken of here as “righteous” are those who are established and do not want to be disturbed, and they are not to be turned away from their faith because they are so established.

I have heard individuals testify that they had received forgiveness of their sins; that they knew they were accepted of God and had received the Holy Spirit; and yet, those individuals have afterwards accepted baptism at my hands. I have known an individual who was so thoroughly fixed in his belief that he would not go to hear the Latter Day Saints; he would not give one a drink of water if he were perishing for it; and he also said he had read the Book of Mormon. But after he had been down in the waters of baptism he confessed that if anybody would have asked him if he had read the Book of Mormon he would testify that he had not, and that when he passed his former judgment upon the Latter Day Saints he was so full of prejudice, that he could not believe and accept the truth; the evil one had the advantage of the man completely. But, all the time, I believed him to be a good and honest man, such a one as the Apostle Paul was before he received the truth.

I want to read you a few statements in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. The first is on page 292, and while this refers directly to the ministry of the church in quorum capacity, I would state that the same character or peculiarity of blessings that should attach to them as a quorum should attach to individuals, because quorums are made up of individuals; and what is true of the ministry is true of the members; and the higher in spiritual life the membership attain the greater will be their influence for good on their neighbors, and they will thereby secure their confidence: “The decisions of these quorums, or either of them are to be made in all righteousness” [now there is a peculiar condition attaches here that I want to emphasize], in holiness and lowliness

of heart, meekness and long suffering, and in faith and virtue and knowledge; temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity, because the promise is, if these things abound in them, they shall not be unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord." If that is true of any organized quorum, then let me say to you, brethren and sisters and friends, that if the same attribute, the same Spirit manifestation be found in the individual life of any minister or any member of the church, God is with that individual; he is manifesting himself to him, and he becomes a living epistle read and known of all men; and his influence will be tenfold greater than if he disregarded the injunction that is presented to us in this.

On page 101 a statement is made to Martin Harris, and what the Lord says to one he says to all. He speaks not only of sacrifice but of fidelity to the gospel, and the humility that should be found in the individual: "Behold, this is a great, and the last commandment which I shall give unto you concerning this matter; for this shall suffice for thy daily walk even unto the end of thy life. And misery thou shalt receive, if thou wilt slight these counsels; yea, even the destruction of thyself and property. Impart a portion of thy property; yea, even part of thy lands, and all save the support of thy family. Pay the debt thou hast contracted with the printer. Release thyself from bondage. Leave thy house and home, except when thou shalt desire to see thy family; and speak freely to all; yea, preach, exhort, declare the truth, even with a

loud voice; with a sound of rejoicing, crying hosanna, hosanna! blessed be the name of the Lord God. Pray always and I will pour out my Spirit upon you, and great shall be your blessing; yea, even more than if you should obtain treasures of earth and corruptibleness to the extent thereof. Behold, canst thou read this without rejoicing and lifting thy heart for gladness; or canst thou run about longer as a blind guide; or canst thou be humble and meek and conduct thyself wisely before me; yea, come unto me thy Savior. Amen."

I have never read these words but I have experienced the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. I have never turned to these exhortations of the Son of God to that man, but what I have comprehended that what he said unto him would apply to me, and that if I gave myself to that law so enjoined upon him, I should obtain the blessing that was promised to him in the grant of eternal life.

Now, in conclusion, brethren and sisters, do you not discover that it is all-important that we should learn what is our duty in the gospel, that our lives may be devoted to the cause of God and the welfare of those with whom we are associated; and unless we are humble, unless we are meek, we shall not be crowned. And if we are faithful to God, and seek in humility to exemplify the gospel, and so conduct our lives as to reflect the life of Jesus Christ, we are not only safe ourselves, but we are saving those who will hear. May God accept of us, bless and guide our lives for Christ's sake. Amen.