

# *Of This Cause I Testify*

J. RICHARD CLARKE

**T**hank you for your attendance today and for the Spirit you bring and for the faith in my behalf. I need that so very much. Well, you look good to me! Each speaker who addresses the student body must wonder who he's really speaking to. Who of us could predict what you will have become 10 or 20 years from now? Each of you will be famous to somebody. I heard Dr. Clayton Christensen of the Harvard Business School, one of the world's leading business strategists, speak at the BYU forum. He was graduated from this university, and how could he dream then of the prestigious accomplishments that he has since achieved? He is proud of his BYU roots, and so am I.

The Lord thinks you are great! And because of this, the Lord, your Redeemer, suffered death in the flesh. He voluntarily gave His own life that as many as would believe might become the sons and daughters of God.

In the world of commerce—of expensive cars and expensive houses—we expect higher prices to assure us of greater value. Who can measure the value of the Savior's sacrifice? When we ponder the horrendous price He paid for our salvation, our sense of personal worth must be enormously enhanced. Shouldn't

this be reassurance enough to secure our self-esteem? As children of the royal birthright, you were born to be great.

When I was a young missionary, I was intrigued with the intellectual giants of the Church who masterfully confounded its critics. I wanted to imitate them. Now, with increased age, I would rather strive for ability to speak simply, with clarity and the Spirit, and not worry about profundity. What about our critics? Well, I'm persuaded they do not need my help to be confounded. They do pretty well on their own.

In the halls of justice the lives of men and women often hang on the single thread of an eyewitness's testimony—on the accuracy of the testimony and the reliability of the witness.

It is a pattern followed also in the scriptures: The Lord personally, or through His angels, reveals truths to prophets who bear testimony of Him and declare with power and boldness the true doctrines of salvation. When the prophet's voice is silenced, the people are

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left to conjecture, debate, and philosophize. The result is spiritual darkness.

The poet Robert Browning described the silencing of the prophetic voice as he lamented the passing of the last living apostle, John the Beloved, in his poem “A Death in the Desert”:

*Still, when they scatter, there is left on earth  
No one alive who knew (consider this!)  
—Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands  
That which was from the first, the Word of Life.  
How will it be when none more saith “I saw”?  
[1864, lines 129–33; see Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 5]*

Prophetic testimony has seldom been popular among the worldly. Pure testimony of revealed truth arouses rejection, scorn, and often wrath from the “natural man.”

The Apostle Paul explained:

*We speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth. . . .*

*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. [1 Corinthians 2:13–14]*

Jesus reproved Nicodemus, ruler of the Jews, for his spiritual insensitivity. The Master declared, “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness” (John 3:11).

In the Old Testament the Lord called prophets to testify of Him and to call rebellious Israel to repentance.

The prophet obeys the Lord and delivers the message. He is not responsible for its acceptance. He is responsible to speak with clarity and spiritual power.

The world generally does not understand the prophetic commission.

I was flying to a stake conference years ago and sat by a German engineer. He was

in charge of a division of a West German company and was living in Salt Lake City. He was impressed with Utah and its people. When he learned that I was a General Authority of the Church, he inquired, “The one thing I don’t understand about you Mormons is: What is this compulsion you seem to have to travel all over the world telling everybody about your religion?” What he didn’t say, but I’m sure was on his mind, was “Why don’t you stay home and mind your own business?”

I responded along these lines: “Are you a Christian?”

He replied, “Yes.”

I asked, “Do you remember the dramatic change that took place in the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus?”

He said, “Yes.”

“What happened?”

“Well, he had this religious experience.”

I said, “He was first obsessed to do everything he could to destroy the church, and then, amazingly, he completely reversed himself and even with greater intensity he became its champion. Quite a turnaround, don’t you think?”

“Yes, it was.”

I said, “Let’s turn to Acts 26 and recall that experience.”

We read the account of Paul’s defense before King Agrippa, how he, in the middle of the day, had seen a light and heard a voice. The Lord spoke to him, saying:

*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.*

*But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;*

*Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles . . . ,*

*To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of*

*sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*

[Then Paul said,] *Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.* [Acts 26:15–19]

I asked my seatmate, “For all practical purposes, did Paul have a viable alternative but to accept the commission he received from the Lord?”

The man answered, “No.”

I continued: “A similar commission has been given in our day. Let’s move the scene ahead some 1,800 years. A young boy is confused by the conflicting claims of the churches of his day. As he pondered his dilemma, he read a simple solution in the epistle of James: ‘If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.’ The boy accepted the invitation. He went into the woods on his father’s farm and prayed for understanding.”

I read to my friend from the boy’s written testimony:

*I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me. . . .*

*. . . Just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, . . . which descended gradually until it fell upon me.*

*. . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him! [JS—H 1:15–17; emphasis in original]*

I related to the man from West Germany that the boy was told that God’s church with a fullness of the truth was not on the earth but that he would be an instrument in its restoration.

Aside from his family who believed him, the boy found that sharing his experience with

the clergy and his neighbors brought ridicule, rejection, and persecution. The Prophet Joseph Smith later stated in response to their behavior:

*However, it was nevertheless a fact that I had beheld a vision. I have thought since, that I felt much like Paul, when he made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice; but still there were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed and reviled. But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise; . . . though they should persecute him unto death. . . .*

*So it was with me. I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart: Why persecute me for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision; and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it. [JS—H 1:24–25]*

“Now, my friend,” I asked the German engineer, “if this young man told the truth, and I am convinced that he did, then did he have any other alternative than to testify, like Paul, of his visitation?”

The man said, “No, I guess not.”

With deep conviction, I concluded: “That is the reason we are compelled to send our missionaries into the world. We are convinced that through Joseph Smith, the restoration of the kingdom of God has occurred. The heavens have been reopened, divine authority has been bestowed, and the doctrines and ordinances of salvation are again restored.”

The plane landed and we went our separate ways.

Joseph Smith, the voice of the latter-day kingdom of God, was foreordained to be a new witness for Christ and our Father. Once again a living prophet revealed the power of heaven and confirmed to the world the truth about God and His Son. At that young age he was the world's greatest living authority on Their true nature. He answered the denials of atheism, the doubts of agnosticism, and unraveled the so-called mystery of the Holy Trinity. He saw, and he declared with simple certitude what he saw.

Believing man has reasoned that the majesty and order of the universe give strong evidence of the reality of God. But that merely demonstrates that an organized intelligence is in control. But who is it?

In the *Lectures on Faith*, prepared chiefly by the Prophet, we read that "it was human testimony, and human testimony only, that excited [the] inquiry, in the first instance, . . . after the knowledge of God" (*Lectures on Faith* 2:56).

Compare or contrast the council debates of Nicaea that produced the creedal definition of the Godhead in A.D. 325 with the simple declarations of Joseph the Prophet in 1832:

*And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!*

*For we saw him, even on the right hand of God.* [D&C 76:22–23]

And later, in 1843, the Prophet wrote:

*The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us.* [D&C 130:22]

It is our knowledge and testimony of God that draws us heavenward. Pure testimony of

Him, born of the Spirit, is the power to change the human heart. Alma demonstrated this when he spearheaded the Nephite reformation.

Another example comes from the ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In 1833 the Prophet accompanied Freeman Nickerson to Canada to visit his sons Freeman and Moses. They were received rudely by young Freeman. He said, "Father, . . . I had just about as soon you had brought into my home a nest of scorpions and turned them loose upon us. . . . I know all about Joe Smith . . . ; the papers are full of him and his works, and I want none of either. . . . But, . . . I'll welcome them for your sake."

Two days passed. Relations became more cordial, but there were no attempts to discuss religion. Freeman had boasted to his wife how he could handle Joe Smith.

On the evening of the second day, Freeman invited everyone to the living room. "He threw the family Bible on to the table . . . with the challenging remark: 'There! Now go to it!'"

The Prophet did not "go to" the Bible. "Instead, he related his own dramatic experiences, . . . told with the utmost simplicity, but with great earnestness."

Freeman apologized for his rudeness. Before the Prophet left town, 14 people, including the Nickerson brothers, were baptized by the Prophet. (Taken from John Henry Evans, *Joseph Smith, an American Prophet* [New York: Macmillan, 1936], 86–88.)

Personal testimony has long been the power of our missionary success.

Elder Porter shared an article written and passed around by a Protestant minister to help his church members combat the Mormon missionaries. This minister wrote:

*Mormons teach that EVERY INDIVIDUAL CAN DIRECTLY RECEIVE DIVINE REVELATION, in fact, this is the Mormon method for distinguishing truth from error. Mormon missionaries teach non-Mormons that, in order to know whether or not the Mormon teachings are true, people*

*should PRAY to God to send REVELATION DIRECTLY AND PERSONALLY to them— God will send the Holy Spirit to speak directly to their heart.*

*The importance of this concept cannot be overemphasized because IT IS THE VERY MEANS BY WHICH MORMONS ARE CONVINCED MORMONISM IS TRUE. Though they have heard facts that support the truth of Mormonism and though the doctrines are reasonable, Mormons do not believe primarily for these reasons. Rather, they believe because they are convinced that GOD HIMSELF HAS PERSONALLY TOLD THEM MORMONISM IS TRUE. This is why few Mormons will reject Mormonism simply if they are shown contradictions between the Bible and Mormonism. They conclude the Bible must be in error (it has been changed through the years, etc.), it cannot be Mormonism is wrong, because they know God has told them it is true! This is the TAPROOT OF MORMONISM—the source from which all Mormonism flows. It is the FOUNDATION of the structure of Mormonism. Destroy it and Mormonism fails. [From the files of Elder L. Aldin Porter, the Presidency of the Seventy]*

There are other significant ways in which we bear witness. It is stated that it isn't fair for society to judge the whole Church and the truth of its doctrine by the questionable acts of one member. That's true in a sense, but, taken as a whole, we as a people reflect a composite representation: the fruit of Mormonism. We cannot escape that responsibility. Our actions may be the only chance someone has in forming an opinion about the Church and its people.

The Lord declared that we should not bear false witness against our neighbors. Are we being true witnesses if our conduct is not congruent with what we profess?

Before becoming a General Authority, I had a very sobering reminder of this. Our business organization was being honored by our company officers for a successful year. One of the vice presidents, whom I had known well for

more than 15 years, called me to the podium during the banquet and announced he had an award for me. He said, "I have been observing you closely under many different circumstances, and I had a personal coat of arms made reflecting what I believe symbolizes the priorities of your life. On the plaque four symbols are represented: Your faith, your family, your profession, and your desire for personal development."

I was honored and humbled to receive the award but was subdued by the thought that someone had been silently observing and evaluating my conduct against my known beliefs. I tell you this not to impress you with my award but to remind us all that we don't know who is watching and judging us as a witness of what and who we are.

Our prophet is concerned with spiritual drift in the Church today. In an effort to be tolerant and respectful of the rights and behavior of others, we must guard against being enticed to the incompatible cultures of the world. I fear an eclipse of virtues is occurring for the undiscerning. I remember that my parents taught me as a boy the clear difference between the standards of the world on the one hand and the standards of the Church on the other. Each was different and should be separate. When an eclipse of virtues occurs, the two, like the sun and the moon, overlap each other, neither being clearly distinguishable, the sun losing its brilliance.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell wisely observed, "The moment of gravest danger is when there is so little light that darkness seems normal!" (*"Behold, I Say unto You, I Cannot Say the Smallest Part Which I Feel"* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973], 75).

We must remember that it isn't necessary for Satan to extinguish light if he can simply keep it dim.

We are called to be witnesses of light. As relating to those not of the faith, the Savior counseled the Nephite church, "Hold up your light that it may shine unto the world.

Behold I am the light which ye should hold up” (3 Nephi 18:24).

We covenant each Sunday to do this, don’t we? We covenant with Heavenly Father that we are willing to take upon ourselves the name of His Son and always remember Him and keep His commandments that He has given us.

The way we dress, the way we act, and the way we treat our neighbor reflects intentionally or unintentionally how we feel about the Savior. Our behavior attests to what we feel most deeply in our hearts. Every day we see the impact of unintended consequences of our behavior.

When I was teaching early morning seminary, a lovely, attractive girl complained that the boys were becoming too aggressive and making unwelcome advances. Her dress was too often immodest and accentuated her girlish figure. I suggested that she was undoubtedly sending the boys the wrong signal. Her dress did not reflect her true standards. We must project virtue—if virtuous we are. God expects us to be as we seem.

Peter admonished us to have our “conduct honest among the Gentiles; that, whereas they speak against [us] as evil-doers, they may by [our] good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (JST, 1 Peter 2:12).

In these days of exaggerated claims and unfulfilled expectations—where so many fail to deliver as promised—we must be true. Latter-day Saints must combine integrity and competence consistent with gospel principles. What great opportunities lie ahead for those who do!

When you are graduated from BYU, your employer will expect that your integrity will not be compromised, that you will give your best efforts to excel, that you will be trustworthy and loyal to your employer. There is so much shoddy performance in our society—too few craftsmen, too few professionals, too few problem solvers, too few who realize that their work is their signature, their witness.

A story is told of an ancient craftsman—a maker of fine doors. He was hired by the king to make two great doors to guard the entrance to the city. After he had hung the doors, there was a celebration in his honor. He did not attend. The citizens didn’t understand. This was his moment of glory. They also noticed that his signature did not appear on the doors—most unusual.

Later, when the king gave him generous payment, he asked the artisan why he had not signed his name on the doors. He replied, “My work is my signature. Moments of glory are just that, only moments. It is one’s work that lives on forever, in the lives of others” (from the files of J. Richard Clarke).

Brothers and sisters, the weight of discipleship can be heavy. It has always been so. We are called to be a “Zion people”—peculiar in righteousness—to leave the world, to be separate. Let us not be ashamed of our singularity. Let us celebrate the “dignity of difference” in our standards of behavior.

We agree with the Protestant minister’s assessment: the strength of the Church is the testimony of individual members and its prophets. It is the “taproot of Mormonism.”

May I in meekness and in humility leave my personal testimony—born of prayer, study, and the affirmation of the Holy Ghost.

I know that God our Father lives. I know that His Son Jesus Christ is our Savior, our Lord, and our Redeemer. I know that His Church has been established on the earth with full power and authority to bring salvation to the world through the ordinances of the holy priesthood and the blessings of the gospel through our missionary service and the committed and dedicated lives of our members. The disciples who are true witnesses for Christ will ever stand as a beacon to the world that God has once again spoken to the earth. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.