

Joseph Smith: The Prophet

DAVID B. HAIGHT

As I look out into the faces of you precious young sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father and sense your unlimited potential to “do good unto all men” (Galatians 6:10), I pray tonight that each of you—and that I—will be blessed with the Spirit of the Lord, that what I testify of will strengthen your faith and desire to personally live and be faithful to all the true principles of God’s eternal plan of salvation—those keys and powers that have been conferred upon all men during these latter days, a fulfillment of the declaration of Paul to the Ephesians “that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Ephesians 1:10).

The Restoration

The principles, doctrines, and ordinances of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ have been revealed anew, including a knowledge of the true nature of God—a personal, loving, Eternal Father—and of Jesus Christ, the literal Son of God, of whose divinity there has come another witness in the Book of Mormon. The words of Ezekiel that the stick of Judah (the Bible) shall be joined with the stick of Joseph (the Book of Mormon) as a testimony of two

nations have found their fulfillment (see Ezekiel 37:15–22). This I solemnly declare to all of you.

The authority to act in the name of God, the holy priesthood, has been conferred upon men in our time by those same individuals who held it anciently—Peter, James, and John—apostles of our Lord who were ordained by the Savior himself when he was upon the earth.

The Church of Jesus Christ has been reestablished. The priesthood of God is again among men. God has revealed himself anew for the blessing of his children.

As I declare to you, my dear young friends, these divine events—with all the characteristics of the Church of the early apostles, including the personal direction of Jesus Christ, divinely revealed doctrine, divinely chosen leaders, continuous revelation, and the witness of the Holy Ghost to all who obey—I testify that the instrument through whom this divine revelation came was one foreordained—the youthful Joseph Smith—whose faith and desire brought about “one of the most significant religious

David B. Haight was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 2 March 1986.

events in the history of mankind” (Milton V. Backman, Jr., “Joseph Smith’s Recitals of the First Vision,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1985, p. 8).

Since my early youth I have believed and carried in my mind a vivid picture of the teenage Joseph finding a secluded spot, kneeling in the quiet grove, and in childlike faith asking the desire of his heart. He must have felt assured the Lord would hear and somehow answer him. There appeared to him two glorious personages, a description of whom, he said, was beyond his ability to express.

I have been blessed, as the years have passed, with unusual experiences with people, places, and personal events of an intimate, spiritual nature, and, through the power of the Holy Ghost, I have received an ever-deepening witness and knowledge of this heaven-directed restoration of the Lord’s plan of salvation. The events related by Joseph Smith of the Restoration are true.

The Vision

Each of you can develop in your bosom an uplifting, sanctifying, and glorifying feeling of its truth. The Holy Ghost will reveal and seal upon each of your hearts this knowledge, if you truly desire. Our understanding, belief, and faith in “the vision” (as we refer to it) of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son appearing to Joseph, thereby ushering in this final dispensation with its great and precious truths, is essential to our eternal salvation. Salvation comes only through Christ. Joseph Smith is the instrument or revealer of that knowledge, divinely called to teach of the terms and conditions of the Father’s plan and given the keys of salvation for all mankind.

The knowledge is mine that God did reveal himself unto Joseph—his witness of this final dispensation. We now know something of the form, features, and even character of that mighty intelligence whose wisdom, creation, and power control the affairs of the universe.

God made it known that Jesus Christ is the express image of the Father.

In Joseph’s own words, the brightness was above anything he had ever known. He looked up. Before him stood two glorious personages. One of them, pointing to the other, said, “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” (JS—H 1:17).

It might have seemed inconceivable to young Joseph that he was looking upon God our Heavenly Father and his Son—that the Lord had come to visit and instruct him.

The Son, bidden by the Father, spoke to the kneeling boy. Joseph was told that all the churches were wrong. They had corrupted the doctrine; they had broken the ordinances and had lost the authority of the priesthood of God. He was told that the leaders of the man-made churches were displeasing to the Lord, that they were collecting money which should be given freely, and that the time for the restoration of all truth and authority had come, including the organization of the Church. Then, to his infinite astonishment, he was told that *he*, Joseph Smith—young, unlearned, but humble—was to be the instrument through whom the Almighty would reestablish his work in these, the latter days—the gospel never to be taken away again. Such was the glorious beginning of the restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Some three years later, as he was beginning to mature, Joseph Smith had another heavenly visitation. This time an angel sent from the presence of God informed Joseph that he was Moroni and revealed to the young man the resting place of a set of gold plates upon which certain ancient inhabitants of America had recorded the history of their peoples. In the course of time, these records were translated by the gift and power of God and published early in 1830.

A Definite Purpose

The Book of Mormon is the most remarkable book in the world from a doctrinal, histor-

ical, or philosophical point of view. Its integrity has been assailed with senseless fury for over a century and a half; yet its position and influence today is more impregnable than ever. The Book of Mormon did not come forth as a curiosity. It was written with a definite purpose—a purpose to be felt by every reader. From the title page we read that it was written “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.” The message it contains is a witness for Christ and teaches the love of God for all mankind. Its purpose is to bring people to accept Jesus as the Christ. The book tells of the actual visit of Christ to ancient America and records the teachings and instructions he gave in clarity and great power to the people. The Book of Mormon substantiates the Bible in its teachings of the Savior, speaks of Christ more than any other subject, and teaches that our Savior is the Redeemer and Atoner of mankind, constantly emphasizing that he is the central figure in God’s plan of salvation. This divine record makes converts to its message and to his Church, which teaches it.

I have marveled at God’s wisdom in bringing forth this ancient record in the manner in which it was accomplished, for it has also become the powerful witness of the divine mission of Joseph Smith. Sunday, November 28, 1841, the Prophet wrote:

I spent the day in the council with the Twelve Apostles at the house of President Young, conversing with them upon a variety of subjects. Brother Joseph Fielding was present, having been absent four years on a mission to England. I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book. [HC 4:461]

Joseph Smith was foreordained to be the duly appointed leader of this, the greatest and

final of all dispensations. After the angel Moroni’s visit, other heavenly messengers conferred upon Joseph holy priesthood authority, divine keys, power, and revelations from God.

Not only was the Church organized under inspiration and divine direction, but the necessary body of doctrine for guidance of the Church was revealed. Faith and light were again available to distill the darkness that was upon the earth. Joseph Smith, after seeking and being taught by the Author of Truth, learned that

1. God is in form like man.
2. He has a voice; he speaks.
3. He is considerate and kind.
4. He answers prayers.
5. His son is obedient to the Father and is the mediator between God and man.

6. “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” (D&C 130:22).

Though Hebrew scriptures make references to temples and baptism for the deceased, Joseph Smith was the first to have revealed the purpose of temples and salvation for all—including those who have passed on without having received a knowledge of the gospel—along with the eternal marriage covenant and sealing of man and woman as the foundation for exaltation.

Joseph Smith, speaking at the first conference of the Church in June 1830, spoke of great happiness “to find ourselves engaged in the very same order of things as observed by the holy Apostles of old” (HC 1:85).

A Prophet of the Lord

Under the inspiration of Almighty God, the Church began to flourish. The Lord’s promise that a “marvelous work is about to come forth” was being fulfilled in a miraculous way (see D&C 4:1). The gospel message spread rapidly. The missionary spirit was touching hearts. The Book of Mormon was being read. Tens, then

hundreds, then thousands joined the Church. The Lord, speaking through Joseph, proclaimed:

For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated. . . .

The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh—

But that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; . . .

That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed. . . unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers. [D&C 1:2, 19–20, 23]

Politicians began worrying over this new phenomenon. Enemies were organizing, and the Prophet's life was becoming endangered. After months of imprisonment in the dark, damp dungeon known as Liberty Jail, a discouraged Joseph cried out to the Lord:

O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?

How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thine eye, . . . behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants, . . .

Yea, O Lord, how long shall they suffer these wrongs and unlawful oppressions, before thine heart shall be softened toward them. [D&C 121:1–3]

Then a loving, answering Savior promised Joseph:

The ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name, and fools shall have thee in derision, and hell shall rage against thee;

While the pure in heart, and the wise, and the noble, and the virtuous, shall seek counsel, and authority, and blessings constantly from under thy hand.

And thy people shall never be turned against thee by the testimony of traitors.

. . . Thou shalt be had in honor; . . . and thy voice shall be more terrible in the midst of thine enemies than the fierce lion, because of thy righteousness; and thy God shall stand by thee forever and ever. [D&C 122:1–4]

In his last public address to a large congregation in Nauvoo, Joseph said:

I do not regard my own life. I am ready to be offered a sacrifice for this people; for what can our enemies do? Only kill the body, and their power is then at an end. Stand firm, my friends; never flinch. Do not seek to save your lives, for he that is afraid to die for the truth will lose eternal life. . . .

*God has tried you. You are a good people; therefore I love you with all my heart. Greater love hath no man than that he should lay down his life for his friends. You have stood by me in the hour of trouble, and I am willing to sacrifice my life for your preservation. [George Q. Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1907), p. 498]*

This statement is all the more remarkable as the Prophet was still in the morning of life—only thirty-eight years old—and great as he had already become, the zenith of his mental and spiritual powers had not yet been reached. Life was precious to him with all its possibilities of future achievements. Yet he was willing to give it up, willing to forego all the honors that might be his, the greatness that would come to him if he lived.

“A Prophet,” wrote Truman Madsen, “is one who, in fulfillment of his mission, undergoes great suffering, yet through it all, is radiant. A Prophet, in short, is a saint.”

Someone has written:

Nowhere in the long lists of martyrs, save only in the case of Joseph Smith, do we find one who voluntarily went out of his way to die for his faith and people. In that fateful hour when the choice of life or death was to be made, Joseph Smith did not hedge,

or sidestep, or seek to save his life, but bravely chose to die, in the hope that his people might henceforth be free to worship God in their own way, and that the testimony which he had borne of a restored gospel might be sanctified [if necessary] by the shedding of his blood.

“Had he been spared a martyr’s fate till mature manhood,” said Parley P. Pratt, “he was certainly endowed with power and ability to have [influenced] the world in many respects.”

One may pick up the thread of Joseph Smith’s life on any day of any year and find incalculable suffering, both his own and the disciples’ around him.

“Be Patient in Afflictions”

Mormonism was appearing to become, as the scripture says, as a stone cut out of a mountain, without hands and rolling forth to fill the whole earth (see D&C 65:2). Political officials worried about it moving outward and abroad from the immediate locale, illegal charges were leveled, court documents and summons were issued, and vigilantes were formed—at Carthage, the county seat. Joseph and Hyrum were to appear to answer charges against them.

As Joseph Smith left Nauvoo for Carthage that twenty-fourth day of June, he would have looked for the last time on the city and the magnificent temple that he loved. He knew he would never look upon it again.

“Be patient in afflictions,” he was told, “for thou shalt have many.” Later, he said adversity had become second nature, but had only “wafted me that much closer to Deity.” Brigham Young said of him that he lived one thousand years in thirty-eight.

To his companions who were accompanying him to Carthage, he gave these prophetic words:

I am going like a lamb to the slaughter, but I am calm as a summer’s morning; I have a

conscience void of offense towards God, and towards all men. . . . And it shall yet be said of me—he was murdered in cold blood. [D&C 135:4]

Why did he not turn back? There was time to escape. He was not yet in the hands of his enemies. Friends were at his side who would die for him if necessary. Some suggested he flee across the Mississippi where he would be safe. But he continued to Carthage.

Joseph must have recalled some of the dangers through which he had passed—like the winter night when a mob broke into his home and with curses and profanity tore him from the bedside of his wife and sick children and dragged him over the frozen ground, kicking and beating him until he was unconscious. When consciousness returned, they stripped him of his clothing and covered his naked body from head to foot with a coat of tar and feathers, forcing open his mouth to fill it with the same substance, then left him on the frozen ground to die of cold and exposure.

Riding to Carthage he might have recalled the time in Missouri when he and some of his brethren had been betrayed into the hands of their enemies. The leader of the mob convened a court; Joseph and his associates were placed on trial for their lives. They were convicted and all sentenced to be shot the next morning at eight o’clock in the public square in Far West. At the appointed hour they were duly led forth to be murdered, but a dispute among the mob saved them.

Without even being permitted to bid farewell to their families, they were taken from place to place and exhibited to jeering crowds while the Saints were told they would never see their leaders again. But Joseph cheered his fellow prisoners by announcing that none of them would suffer death.

“Be of good cheer, brethren,” he said, “the word of the Lord came to me last night that our lives should be given us, . . . not one of our lives shall be taken” (HC 3:200).

As Joseph contemplated those dreary months of imprisonment in Missouri, he must have recalled the night, when confined in a dungeon, he rebuked the guards. He and his brethren were trying to get a little sleep, but were kept awake by the awful blasphemies and obscene jests of their jailers, who were recounting the dreadful deeds of robbery and murder they had committed among the Mormons. These were no idle boasts, for these awful atrocities had actually been committed. Suddenly, Joseph rose to his feet and, in a voice that seemed to shake the very building, cried out:

Silence, ye fiends of the infernal pit! In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you, and command you to be still; I will not live another minute and hear such language. Cease such talk, or you or I die this instant! [HC 3:208]

The effect must have been electric in its suddenness. Some begged his pardon while others slunk into the dark corners of Liberty Jail to hide their shame.

The power of Jesus Christ, whose name he had invoked in his rebuke, was upon him. His hands and feet were in chains, but these the guards did not see. They saw only the righteous anger in his shining face, and felt the divine power in his voice as he rebuked them.

But if Joseph's voice was terrible as the roaring lion in his rebuke of the wicked, it was soothing as a mother's voice in comfort to the righteous. In that same name and by the same authority with which he silenced the blasphemies of the guards, he had blessed little children, baptized repentant sinners, conferred the Holy Ghost, healed the sick, and spoken words of comfort and consolation to thousands.

"Are You Afraid to Die?"

It was midnight when the wagon journey from Nauvoo ended. Joseph and his brethren entered Carthage, and his fate was sealed. His

enemies had awaited their coming with great anxiety. The governor, who was present, persuaded the mob to disperse that night by promising them that they should have full satisfaction.

The next day, after a hearing, Joseph was released on bail, but re-arrested on a trumped-up charge of treason. Bail was refused and Joseph and Hyrum were placed in Carthage Jail.

The last night of Joseph's life on earth he bore a powerful testimony, to the guards and others who assembled at the door of the jail, of the divinity of the Book of Mormon, also declaring that the gospel had been restored and the kingdom of God established on the earth. It was for this reason that he was incarcerated in prison, not for violating any law of God or man.

It was late at night when they tried to get some rest. At first Joseph and Hyrum occupied the only bed in the jail room, but a gunshot during the night and a disturbance led Joseph's friends to insist that he take a place between two of them on the floor. They would protect him with their own bodies. Joseph asked Elder Markham to use his arm for a pillow while they conversed, then he turned to Elder Dan Jones, on the other side, and whispered, "Are you afraid to die?" And this staunch friend answered, "Has that time come, think you? Engaged in such a cause, I do not think death would have many terrors."

Joseph replied, "You will yet see Wales, and fulfill the mission appointed you before you die" (HC 6:601).

The next morning, the fateful twenty-seventh of June, 1844, three of the brethren left the prison and only four remained—Joseph and Hyrum and two of the apostles, both of whom during the day offered to die for him. The day was spent in writing letters to their wives, conversing on principles of the gospel, and singing. Between three and four o'clock in the afternoon the Prophet requested Elder John

Taylor to sing the words of “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief.”

This comforting song breathes in every line the very spirit and message of Christ. Only a person who loved his Savior and his fellow-men would have requested to hear these words at such a time.

When Elder Taylor had finished the song, the Prophet’s eyes were wet with tears, and he said, “Sing that song again, will you, John?” (Claire Noall, *Intimate Disciple; a Portrait of Willard Richards, Apostle to Joseph Smith—Cousin of Brigham Young* [Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1957], p. 440).

John “replied that he did not feel like singing. He was oppressed with a sense of coming disaster” (*Life of Joseph Smith*, p. 524).

“You’ll feel better once you begin, and so will I,” replied Joseph (*Intimate Disciple*, p. 440).

Hyrum also pleaded with him to repeat the song. And Elder Taylor did.

This time his voice was even sadder and more tender than at first, and when he concluded, all were hushed, but four hearts beat faster for they had carefully listened to the fateful words:

*My friendship’s utmost zeal to try,
He asked if I for him would die.
The flesh was weak; my blood ran chill,
But my free spirit cried, “I will!”*
[*Hymns*, 1985, no. 29]

The other three heard Joseph murmur as an echo to the song, “I will!”

The love of Christ was in the song; the love of man was there in that room in the Carthage Jail.

While this spirit of love and service for men expressed in song and prayer filled the hearts of all within the jail, the mob was gathering. The final details you know.

Only Love Begets Love

When the news of the awful crime reached Nauvoo, the citizens were overcome with grief and horror. Probably such universal sorrow had not been known in an American city before. The warm summer sun left them cold and chill. Their prophet and their patriarch were dead. What else mattered?

When the wagon carrying the bodies was still a long way off, the entire population of Nauvoo went out to meet it. No greater tribute was ever paid to mortal man than was paid that day to Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Such universal love from those who knew them best could never have been won by selfish and designing men. Only love begets love. Once when Joseph had been asked how he had acquired so many followers and retained them, he replied, “It is because I possess the principle of love. All that I offer the world is a good heart and good hand.”

Sariah Workman, an early immigrant, wrote: “I felt a divine influence whenever I was in his presence.”

John Taylor, who was wounded at Carthage and later became prophet, said of him:

Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it. In the short space of twenty years, he has brought forth the Book of Mormon, which he translated by the gift and power of God, and has been the means of publishing it on two continents; has sent the fulness of the everlasting gospel, which it contained, to the four quarters of the earth; has brought forth the revelations and commandments which compose this book of Doctrine and Covenants, and many other wise documents and instructions for the benefit of the children of men; gathered many thousands of the Latter-day Saints, founded a great city, and left a fame and name that cannot be slain. He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; and like most of the Lord’s anointed in

ancient times, has sealed his mission and his works with his own blood. [D&C 135:3]

I leave each of you my love and testament that God, our Father, lives, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, crucified for the sins of the world “to cleanse it from all unrighteousness; that through him all might be saved” (D&C 76:41–42).

He is our Redeemer, our Lord, our King. His kingdom is again established on the earth.

In the year 1820, God, our Eternal Father, and his son Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith, who was foreordained to be the instrument of the Restoration, which is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This Church, by divine direction, is preparing the world for his second coming—for he will come again. This I humbly declare in his holy name. Amen.