

# *Remarks at the Dedication of the Joseph F. Smith Building at Brigham Young University*

GORDON B. HINCKLEY

**I**t is a wonderful thing we do in honoring the memory of President Joseph F. Smith as we dedicate the magnificent new building that carries his name.

He was the sixth president of the Church. I am the 15th, and I feel like a pygmy when I think of standing in the same circle with him. I have felt to talk about him in this gathering with the hope that each one here might profit from his life and words. Much of what I say will be familiar to many of you, but it bears repeating.

He was the last president of the Church who was personally acquainted with the Prophet Joseph. He was, of course, a nephew of the Prophet, and the son of Hyrum Smith, Joseph's esteemed older brother. Of his familiarity with the Prophet he said on one occasion:

*As a child I knew the Prophet Joseph Smith. As a child I have listened to him preach the gospel that God had committed to his charge and care. As a child I was [as] familiar in his home, in his household, as I was familiar under my own father's roof. I have retained the witness of the Spirit that I was imbued with, as a child, and that I received from my sainted mother, the firm belief that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God; that he was inspired*

*as no other man in his generation, or for centuries before, had been inspired; that he had been chosen of God to lay the foundations of God's Kingdom.* [GD, 493]

Joseph F. Smith was born at Far West, Missouri, November 13, 1838. This was a terrible season in the history of this Church. The Prophet and Hyrum with others were cast into that foul dungeon prison known as Liberty Jail. His mother's home was searched and ransacked by the brutal mob that killed and threatened and finally forced our people to leave and, in winter weather, go east across most of the state of Missouri and then across the Mississippi to Quincy, Illinois, where they were afforded temporary hospitality.

In Nauvoo they enjoyed a brief respite from persecution. Then it raised its ugly fangs again. As a little boy of five, he watched his father and the Prophet mount their horses for the ride to Carthage and to death.

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Hyrum, his father, reached down and lifted little Joseph. He affectionately held him in his arms and kissed him for the last time in mortality.

Joseph never forgot the night when a man knocked on his mother's window and said, "Sister Smith, your husband has been killed." The image of his weeping mother, now widowed, remained with him throughout his life. Nor did he ever forget his mother's faith in the face of adversity.

His mother did not have the means to go with the first group that left Nauvoo. She went later, and her son told of the time when she and her brother, also named Joseph Fielding, and the little boy Joseph, then a mere child, drove their wagons down to St. Joseph, Missouri, to buy provisions for the long journey ahead. On their return to Winter Quarters they camped for the night. During the night two of their oxen disappeared. Men with a herd of cattle were about three-quarters of a mile away. Joseph and his uncle searched all through the morning looking for their lost oxen. Exhausted and wet to the skin, they returned to their wagons to report their inability to find the oxen.

Joseph F. Smith recorded:

*As I approached I saw my mother kneeling down in prayer. I halted for a moment and then drew gently near enough to hear her pleading with the Lord not to suffer us to be left in this helpless condition, but to lead us to recover our lost team, that we might continue our travels in safety. When she arose from her knees I was standing near by. The first expression I caught upon her precious face was a lovely smile, which, discouraged as I was, gave me renewed hope and assurance that I had not felt before. [In Preston Nibley, *The Presidents of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 185]*

His uncle told her that the oxen were lost and that there was no way to find them. They had searched everywhere. She replied that he

and Joseph should eat their breakfast that she had prepared. She then began to walk in a new direction. Seeing her, the chief herdsman of the cattle rode up to her and said:

*"Madam, I saw your oxen over yonder in that direction this morning about daybreak," pointing in the opposite direction from that in which [she] was going. [In Nibley, *Presidents*, 186]*

She totally disregarded him and continued to walk in the opposite direction from which he had directed her. She came directly to what she was looking for. There were her oxen down by a little stream fastened to a clump of willows.

That example of his mother's tremendous faith became the rootstock of his own faith.

In the spring of 1848 they set out for the valley of the Great Salt Lake. Joseph, then a nine-year-old boy, drove an ox team on that long and difficult journey.

One day while on that journey, one of their oxen suddenly stopped, dropped to its knees, and rolled over, apparently dying. Those who looked on declared the animal dead.

His mother searched through her belongings and found a bottle of consecrated oil. She asked the brethren to anoint and bless the oxen. They did so. Miraculously he came alive, gathered up his legs, rose to his full stature, and moved forward as if nothing had happened. (See Nibley, *Presidents*, 188.)

They arrived in the valley in September of 1848. Four years later, in 1852, Mary Fielding Smith passed away. Joseph was now left an orphan—not yet 14 years of age. Not long after, he discontinued school, receiving no more formal education for the remainder of his life. Yet he became one of the most eloquent speakers this Church has ever known.

At the age of 15 he was ordained an elder and called on a mission to the Hawaiian Islands. Much of the time he labored alone. He had no money. Concerning this discouraging time, he later said:

*I was almost naked and entirely friendless, except [for] the friendship of a poor, benighted, degraded people. I felt as if I was so debased in my condition of poverty, lack of intelligence and knowledge, just a boy, that I hardly dared look a . . . man in the face.*

*While in that condition I dreamed [one night] that I was on a journey, and I was impressed that I ought to hurry—hurry with all my might, for fear I might be too late. I rushed on my way as fast as I possibly could, and I was only conscious of having just a little bundle, a handkerchief with a small bundle wrapped in it. . . . I came to a wonderful mansion. . . . It seemed too large, too great to have been made by hand, but I thought I knew that was my destination. As I passed towards it, as fast as I could, I saw a notice [that read], “Bath.” I turned aside quickly and went into the bath and washed myself clean. I opened up this little bundle that I had, and there was a pair of white, clean garments, . . . and I put them on. Then I rushed to what appeared to be a great opening, or door. I knocked and the door opened, and the man who stood there was the Prophet Joseph Smith. He looked at me a little reprovingly, and the first words he said [were]: “Joseph, you are late.” . . .*

*[I replied,] “Yes, but I am clean—I am clean!”*

*He clasped my hand and drew me in, then closed the great door. I felt his hand just as tangible as I ever felt the hand of man. I knew him, and when I entered I saw my father, and Brigham and Heber, and Willard, and other good men that I had known, standing in a row. . . . My mother was there. . . .*

*When I awoke that morning [alone, away up in the mountains of Hawaii] I was a man, although only a boy. There was not anything in the world that I feared. I could meet any man or woman or child and look them in the face, feeling in my soul that I was a man every whit. That vision, that manifestation and witness that I enjoyed at that time has made me what I am, if I am anything that is good, or clean, or upright before the Lord, if there is anything good in me. That has helped me out in every trial and through every difficulty. . . .*

*. . . I felt as if I had been lifted out of a slum, out of a despair, out of the wretched condition that I was*

*in; and naked as I was, or as nearly as I was, I was not afraid of any . . . man . . . , and I have not been very much afraid of anybody else since that time. I know that that was a reality, to show me my duty, to teach me something, and to impress upon me something that I cannot forget. I hope it never can be banished from my mind. [GD, 542–43]*

He subsequently served as a missionary in the British Isles. While laboring in Sheffield, he was present in a meeting when William Fowler asked that the choir sing the hymn he had just composed. That hymn was “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet” (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 19).

When he was only 27 years of age, Brigham Young ordained him an Apostle and called him as a counselor to the First Presidency.

He served as a counselor to Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Lorenzo Snow—the only man to serve as counselor to four presidents of the Church. Joseph F. Smith became president of the Church on October 17, 1901. He served for 17 years, dying November 19, 1918, at the age of 80.

It is my opinion that no man, save the Prophet Joseph only, has had a greater and better understanding of the origin and history of the Church and of its doctrines—not only concerning this life but also concerning the eternities. There have been other great exponents, but I think none has had a broader or deeper understanding, nor spoken so eloquently concerning these matters.

He spoke of true education, the kind we hope is imparted at this university. Said he:

*The mere stuffing of the mind with a knowledge of facts is not education. The mind must not only possess a knowledge of truth, but the soul must revere it, cherish it, love it as a priceless gem; and this human life must be guided and shaped by it in order to fulfil its destiny. The mind should not only be charged with intelligence, but the soul should be filled with admiration and desire for pure intelligence which comes of a knowledge of the truth. The*

*truth can only make him free who hath it, and will continue in it. And the word of God is truth, and it will endure forever.*

*Educate yourself not only for time, but also for eternity. [GD, 269]*

To provide this kind of education the Church maintains this university with a great infusion of its resources. It demonstrates to all the world that the acquisition of secular knowledge is important, but just as important is the acquisition of spiritual truth.

President Joseph F. Smith had an understanding of the eternal nature of man that few others have ever possessed. As a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, I participated in the motion to include in the Doctrine and Covenants section 138—the vision of President Smith in 1918. It is a document without parallel. Let me read just a small portion of it. Said he:

*On the third of October, in the year nineteen hundred and eighteen, I sat in my room pondering over the scriptures;*

*And reflecting upon the great atoning sacrifice that was made by the Son of God, for the redemption of the world;*

*And the great and wonderful love made manifest by the Father and the Son in the coming of the Redeemer into the world;*

*That through his atonement, and by obedience to the principles of the gospel, mankind might be saved. . . .*

*As I pondered over these things . . . , the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great.*

*And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality;*

*And who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer's name.*

*All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ.*

*I beheld that they were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand. [D&C 138:1–4, 11–15]*

And then he went on to speak of his vision of the redemption of the dead, setting forth the deep and eternal meaning of the Atonement of the Redeemer. There is nothing quite like it in all of our sacred literature.

Suffice it to say that no man, save the Prophet only, has spoken in the defense, advocacy, and explanation of this work more eloquently and more persuasively than Joseph F. Smith, in whose name we dedicate this building today.

President Heber J. Grant, who succeeded him in the presidency, said at his funeral:

*No man that ever lived had a more powerful testimony of the living God and of our Redeemer than Joseph F. Smith. . . . I loved Joseph F. Smith as I never loved any other man that I have ever known. May God bless his memory. [In Nibley, Presidents, 208–9]*

To which I add my testimony—based on my study of his life and my reading of his sermons—that he was a man of unshakable courage in the face of adversity, of industry and devotion, and of faith and knowledge concerning this great Latter-day work of the Redeemer. It is proper that this wonderful new building carry the name of this remarkable man. Of this I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

I now invite all of you to bow your heads and close your eyes as we offer a prayer of dedication on the Joseph F. Smith Building.

### **Dedicatory Prayer**

O God, our Eternal Father, we bow our heads in love and gratitude on the occasion of the dedication of the Joseph F. Smith Building on the Brigham Young University campus.

We thank Thee for him whose name it bears, for his integrity, for his great devotion, and for his remarkable faith. He served as sixth president of the Church, the son of Hyrum Smith and a nephew of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He was undeviating in his testimony of Thy living reality and of that of Thy Beloved Son, our Redeemer. He was a man of practical wisdom and industry, of work and study, with an appreciation for the temporal aspects of life. His mind likewise reached into the depths of the things of eternity, the great spiritual architecture of Thy divine and eternal plan. Great was his wisdom, great his understanding of things both of life and eternity.

Orphaned as a boy, he served Thee with faith and courage, with industry and love throughout his life. How fitting it is therefore that this beautiful new facility on this campus should carry his name.

And so, acting in the authority of the holy priesthood in us vested, and in the name of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, we dedicate and consecrate this structure. We dedicate it to the accomplishment of Thy divine purposes. We dedicate it as a place for teaching and learning, for pondering and reflecting on the wonders of the world in which we live and on the eternal verities of life.

We pray that all who use this facility may do so with appreciation and gratitude for the consecrations of Thy people throughout the world who have made this possible. We pray that the instructors who serve here may feel Thy inspiration in their sacred work of education. We pray that the minds of their students may be enlightened and their intellects sharpened as they partake of the knowledge here to be obtained.

These facilities will be used not only for weekday university education but also for instruction and worship on the Sabbath. It will house wards and stakes in their appointed activities. We pray that the truths of the restored gospel may ring forth from the pulpits of this building. We pray that testimony and a witness of the truth may be experienced and spoken in these halls in Sunday worship. We pray that pleasant sociality may be maintained and here nurtured.

Father, we are grateful for this unique and beautiful structure, designed with unusual features that speak of the glories of the universe and of Thine overruling hand. With thanksgiving unto Thee, we thus dedicate and consecrate this structure to the many purposes for which it will be used and to Thy glory and to Thine honor in the spirit of this university where young men and women come to learn and from where they go forth to serve in all the world.

We do so humbly and gratefully to Thy glory, and to the glory of Thy Beloved Son, in His sacred name, even the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

