

# Joseph Smith: A Revealer of Christ

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I devoutly and sincerely hope that we may have a rich outpouring of the Holy Spirit, for two reasons: first, so that I may say what the Lord wants said and what he would say if he personally were here; and secondly, so that those words will sink into your hearts and you will know of a surety that they are true. I shall take as a subject, “Joseph Smith: A Revealer of Christ.”

I have chosen as a text statement these words, prepared and published by the First Presidency of the Church in 1935 on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the organization of the first Quorum of Twelve Apostles in our dispensation:

*Two great truths must be accepted by mankind if they shall save themselves: first, that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Only Begotten, the very Son of God, whose atoning blood and resurrection save us from the physical and spiritual death brought to us by the fall; and next, that God has restored to the earth, in these last days, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, His holy Priesthood with the fulness of the everlasting Gospel, for the salvation of all men on the earth. Without these truths man may not hope for the riches of the life hereafter. [The Improvement Era, April 1935, pp. 204–5]*

We have a great pattern, a revealed pattern interwoven in all of the revelations that have been given in all ages, that indicates how salvation is made available to men on earth. As we are all aware, we are here on earth as the spirit children of God, our Heavenly Father. We are here inhabiting bodies—tabernacles made of clay—to be tried and examined and tested to see if we will do all things that the Lord directs and commands for his children generally and for each of us in particular. We are here to see if we will believe eternal truth and if we will conform to the principles so accepted and so learned. And if we believe and obey, we manage to do the things that will enable us, first, to have peace and joy and happiness in this life, and secondly, to go on to eternal reward in our Father’s kingdom.

For every age in which the gospel is given, for every gospel dispensation, for every time that a gracious God dispenses the plan of

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salvation to his children on earth, he follows an identical pattern: he reveals two great truths which apply to the dispensation involved. One of these truths applies to all dispensations and the other to the specific dispensation. The truth of universal application for all men in all ages from father Adam to the last man is that salvation is in Christ; that he is the Redeemer and Savior of men; that in and through his atoning sacrifice, by the blood that he shed and the redemption that he wrought, salvation is available for all men. Because of Christ, all men will be raised in immortality, and those who believe and obey will then be raised unto eternal life in our Father's kingdom.

Immortality, by definition and in its nature, is to live everlastingly with a body of flesh and bones; it is to be resurrected; it is to have body and spirit inseparably connected. Eternal life, on the other hand, is, for one thing, to live eternally in the family unit and, for another thing, to inherit, possess, and receive the dignity, honor, power, and glory of God himself. Any one for whom the family unit continues in eternity will have eternal life, and in process of time he will acquire all the dignity, honor, glory, power, might, and omnipotence that the Eternal Father possesses.

Immortality comes because of the Lord Jesus Christ; it is a free gift for all men. Eternal life is made available through the same atoning sacrifice, and it is a gift to all who obey the law upon which its receipt is predicated. The laws of salvation are the same for every age. They have never varied, and they will never vary. Every man from Adam to the last soul to inhabit this earth must do precisely and exactly the same things and obey the same laws in order to inherit, receive, and possess the same glory in eternity.

Salvation is in Christ, and in order for men to believe and obey, the laws of Christ and the doctrine of Christ—which comprise his everlasting gospel—must be revealed in whatever age is involved. That is a universal, unvarying

requirement. The gospel did not originate in the meridian of time—it did not start when the Lord Jesus was upon earth. It is an everlasting gospel. It commenced in the beginning, it has come down in successive periods or dispensations from the days of Adam to the present, and it will continue as long as men are on earth; and always and everlastingly salvation will be in Christ.

But we need a revealer of the knowledge of salvation for whatever dispensation is involved. Our revelation says, "Salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent" (Mosiah 3:18). We need make no mistake about that. Our affection, our interest, our concern, our love, our devotion—all that we have and all that we possess is centered in the Lord Jesus; but, having said that affirmatively and unequivocally and positively, we come to the fact that a revealer of the knowledge of Christ and of salvation is needed for every age of the earth. Thus we find such a thing in our revelations as this: "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" (D&C 135:3). And so, for our dispensation, we link the names of Christ and of Joseph Smith.

Now I read you these words of Brigham Young:

*Who can justly say aught against Joseph Smith? I was as well acquainted with him, as any man. I do not believe that his father and mother knew him any better than I did. I do not think that a man lives on the earth that knew him any better than I did; and I am bold to say that, Jesus Christ excepted, no better man ever lived or does live upon this earth. I am his witness. He was persecuted for the same reason that any other righteous person has been or is persecuted at the present day. [John A. Widtsoe, comp., Discourses of Brigham Young, 2d ed., pp. 702–3]*

Let us gain a true vision; let us reason together and figure out how the Lord operates with reference to his children. First of all, we read in the visions of Abraham about the noble and great in the premortal life who were fore-ordained. Abraham is told that he is one of them. They are identified as the offspring of the Father, as spirits, as souls; and then the account says, “And there stood one among them that was like unto God.” This is the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jehovah. This is the firstborn in the spirit who, through righteousness and zealousness and obedience, became “like unto God,” meaning unto the Father.

*And he [that is, Christ] said unto those who were with him [the host of noble and great ones, the ones Abraham had seen]: We will go down [not I, Jehovah, alone, but we, the noble and great, the mighty and valiant sons of our Father; we will go down] for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these [that is, the spirit hosts of heaven] may dwell;*

*And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them. [Abraham 3:24–25]*

Who is listed and counted in that great council of eternity, that assemblage of the noble and great seen by Abraham? There is not much question in our minds; they were the people who were foreordained to minister to men in this world.

We know a little bit about the order of priority, the precedence, and the rank that is involved. We know that the Lord Jesus was number one: mighty, superior, valiant, intelligent above all others. We know that a spirit named Michael was number two, and that he was born into this world as Adam, the first man. We know that a spirit named Gabriel stood third in preeminence, might, and power, and that he came among us as Noah.

After that we cannot specifically and definitely categorize the various spirits; but we do know that the noblest and the greatest and the mightiest among them were ordained to be heads of dispensations—to be the individuals who, for their era and age and dispensation, would commence the spread of eternal truth on earth. We know, for instance, with reference to Moses, who was the head of one of these dispensations, that “there arose not another prophet . . . in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deuteronomy 34:10). That sets us a pattern. We know of men like Enoch, who so lived that he perfected his whole city and his whole people, and they were translated and taken up into heaven. We look back at Abraham and consider him to be the Father of the Faithful and rejoice that we are born as his seed.

There is a limited number of mighty, noble spirits who headed the respective dispensations. How many we do not know; perhaps there were eight or ten or twenty, but the number does not matter. At any rate, we soon have a small group of select individuals who stand in intelligence and power and might next to the Lord Jehovah. In the same sense that he was like unto God, these chosen and select individuals who were destined to head his work for these long ages were like unto Christ.

When sifting out the relative importance of individuals, without knowing the details, we can conclude that a man born in modern times to head this dispensation was like unto Adam, like unto Moses, like unto Abraham, like unto Christ—in other words, was one of the ten or twenty noblest and greatest spirits who, up to this time, have been born into mortality. He and hosts with him performed their labors and their work in the creative enterprises that brought this earth rolling into existence, and he and his associates headed the periods of time when eternal truth went out to the sons of men.

That is how we rank and place the prophet Joseph Smith: he is one of the great

dispensation heads, and a dispensation head is a revealer for his age and his period of the knowledge of Christ and of salvation. Thus, the other prophets of the dispensation who are associated with him and who come after him, who sustain his work and bear record of him, become witnesses that he—the chief prophet of their age—revealed the Lord Jesus and hence made salvation available.

This means that in a testimony meeting in our day we link the name of Joseph Smith with that of Jesus Christ. We stand up and say, “I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.” And in the next breath we say, “I know that Joseph Smith, Junior, was chosen, appointed, anointed, and called as God’s prophet for this age in order to reveal Christ and to reveal salvation.” We bear witness of Christ, and we bear witness of Joseph Smith.

That is the way it has been from the beginning. There have always been testimony meetings. If we had lived in the days of Adam and had assembled to worship the Lord, the Spirit would have rested mightily upon us on occasions and we would have said, “I know that salvation is in Christ who shall come, and I know that Adam, our father, is a legal administrator who holds keys and powers and authority, and that he is the revealer of the knowledge of Christ and of salvation for men on earth.”

If we had lived in the days of Enoch, we would have arisen in our testimony meetings and said, “I testify of Christ, and I testify of Enoch who revealed Christ, and automatically I believe also in Adam who went before.” That pattern would also have been followed in Noah’s day, in Abraham’s day, in Melchizedek’s day, and in every age when eternal truth has been revealed. Always we would have linked the name of Christ and the name of the dispensation head, and automatically we would have believed in every prophet that went before.

We cannot suppose for one minute that it would be possible for someone who lived in

the days of the Lord Jesus to believe that he was the son of God and yet to reject the witness of Peter, James, and John. That is a philosophical impossibility. Had we lived in that day it would not have been possible to say, “Well, I’ll believe in Christ; but I won’t believe in Peter, James, and John, his apostles, who have revealed him to me and who have borne witness of his divine Sonship.” The Lord and his prophets always go together. With that in mind let me read these words of Brigham Young:

*Whosoever confesseth that Joseph Smith was sent of God to reveal the holy Gospel to the children of men, and lay the foundation for gathering Israel, and building up the kingdom of God on the earth, that spirit is of God; and every spirit that does not confess that God has sent Joseph Smith, and revealed the everlasting Gospel to and through him, is of Antichrist, no matter whether it is found in a pulpit or on a throne. [JD 8:176–77]*

Having these concepts and these expressions in mind, I am going to read to you some passages given and spoken by the Lord Jesus, in which he associates himself with John the Baptist. Out of these passages we shall have an affirmation and a reaffirmation of the truth and concept that Christ and his prophets go together, that it is not possible to believe in one without believing in the other, and that by rejecting the prophets we reject Christ himself. Jesus said this:

*If I bear witness of myself, yet my witness is true.*

*For I am not alone, there is another who beareth witness of me, and I know that the testimony which he giveth of me is true.*

*Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness also unto the truth.*

*And he received not his testimony of man, but of God, and ye yourselves say that he is a prophet, therefore ye ought to receive his testimony. [John 5:32–35; Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible,*

hereafter cited as JST; all biblical references without this notation come from the King James Version]

John bore as persuasive and powerful a testimony as we know of or find in any written record. On those occasions of Christ's visits to him near Bethabara, as he baptized in Jordan, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 36). That was simply a text statement or a subject head for long discourses that he obviously preached about the divine Sonship. On one occasion John said this—and it is as blunt and as plain as any witness—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). John said, in effect, "Here is Jesus; he is the Son of God." There was no possible way to believe that John was a prophet and reject the Lord Jesus. To accept one was to accept the other. Jesus said,

*John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and bore record of me, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him; and ye, afterward, when ye had seen me, repented not, that ye might believe him.*

*For he that believed not John concerning me, cannot believe me, except he first repent.*

*And except ye repent, the preaching of John shall condemn you in the day of judgment.*  
[Matthew 21:32–34; JST]

We could recite that over again, paraphrasing the language, and apply it to Joseph Smith and his situation in our day.

Here is another passage:

*Then said the Pharisees unto him, Why will ye not receive us with our baptism, seeing we keep the whole law?*

*But Jesus said unto them, Ye keep not the law. If ye had kept the law, ye would have received me, for I am he who gave the law.*

*I receive not you with your baptism, because it profiteth you nothing.*

*For when that which is new is come, the old is ready to be put away.* [Matthew 9:18–21; JST]

Following those expressions came the ones with which we are so familiar, about putting new wine in old bottles. In other words, we have new revelation in our day in a new church, just as the case was in the meridian dispensation.

*Then certain of them came to him, saying, Good Master, we have Moses and the prophets, and whosoever shall live by them, shall he not have life?*

*And Jesus answered, saying, Ye know not Moses, neither the prophets; for if ye had known them, ye would have believed on me; for to this intent they were written. For I am sent that ye might have life.* [Luke 14:35–36; JST]

The principle that the Lord and his prophets go together is a glorious one. Here are some words I wrote on this subject on one occasion.

#### LIVING ORACLES

*We be Abraham's children, the Jews said to Jove;  
We shall follow our Father, inherit his trove.  
But from Jesus our Lord, came the stinging rebuke:  
Ye are children of him, whom ye list to obey;  
Were ye Abraham's seed, ye would walk in his path,  
And escape the strong chains of the father of wrath.*

*We have Moses the seer, and the prophets of old;  
All their words we shall treasure as silver and gold.  
But from Jesus our Lord, came the sobering voice;  
If to Moses ye turn, then give heed to his word;  
Only then can ye hope for rewards of great worth,  
For he spake of my coming and labors on earth.*

*We have Peter and Paul, in their steps let us trod;  
So religionists say, as they worship their God.*

*But speaks He who is Lord of the living and dead:  
In the hands of those prophets, those teachers and  
seers,  
Who abide in your day have I given the keys;  
Unto them ye must turn, the Eternal to please.*

With those principles in mind, let us be vividly and acutely aware of their application to Joseph Smith. One of our revelations says—in the words of the Lord Jesus, speaking to Joseph Smith—“This generation shall have my word through you” (D&C 5:10). I think He made that statement, either in those verbatim words or in thought content, to every dispensation head there has been. I think he said it to Enoch, Moses, Abraham, and in principle to all: “This generation shall have my word through you.” Someone has to reveal eternal truth, and these brethren whom I have mentioned are the ones to whom the Lord gave that obligation.

Therefore, we find such directives as this, spoken by the Lord to the Church immediately following its organization on the sixth day of April in 1830. He is talking about Joseph Smith:

*Thou [the church] shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me.*

[Now note:] *For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.* [This sets a dispensation head apart from all other prophets. Here is the subsequent statement about him:]

*Behold, I will bless all those who labor in my vineyard with a mighty blessing, and they shall believe on his words, which are given him through me by the Comforter, which manifesteth that Jesus was crucified by sinful men for the sins of the world, yea, for the remission of sins unto the contrite heart.* [D&C 21:4–5, 9]

What is the measure of our discipleship? How do we measure and test how firmly we are rooted in the restored faith? I think one of

the great tests is the degree and the extent, the fervor and sincerity, the devotion and true belief that we give to the words that came from the Prophet Joseph Smith. Here is a man that, first of all, gave us the Book of Mormon—the Book of Mormon, which is an account of God’s dealings with a people who had the fullness of the gospel, which bears record of Christ, which recounts in plainness and in simplicity the basic and fundamental truths that men must believe to be saved. Here is a man who gave a book of incomparable value—his words, as it were to us, at least, because it was through his instrumentality that they came. Here is a man who gave us the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants—revelations which speak in the first person, with the Lord Jesus himself being mouth and voice but the lips being the lips of Joseph Smith—a volume of revealed truth where God Almighty speaks through his prophet.

Here are words that the Prophet gave us in the Pearl of Great Price, the Book of Moses being taken from the Joseph Smith translation of the scriptures and the Book of Abraham being translated from the papyrus. Here are words in many places in the Joseph Smith Translation itself, revealed words that come from God by prophetic power. Here are sermons—majestic, wondrous, marvelous sermons which recount the mind and will and plan and purposes of the Lord to men on earth—for instance, the King Follet sermon from which President Kimball quoted copiously at the funeral sermon of Brother Stapley recently.

We speak about judging a man by his fruits, and among the great fruits of Joseph Smith are the words that he spoke, the words that he wrote, the inspired message that he gave. I suggest that a measure of discipleship, a standard of judgment whereby we can tell how firmly we are anchored in the faith of the Lord, is how sincerely and completely we believe the words that have come from the Prophet Joseph Smith. Obviously incident to this, we have an

obligation and a need to treasure up these words, to search out these truths, to learn what they are, and then to make them a living part of us.

We bear testimony of Christ, and we do it with all the fervor and conviction and power of our whole soul, striving and laboring to do it by the power of the Holy Ghost; and as our voices echo and reecho the eternal verity that Christ is the Lord, we say also that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, a legal administrator who had power from God—keys and authority—so that he could bind on earth and have it sealed eternally in the heavens. Here, we say, is Joseph Smith, a revealer of the knowledge of Christ and of salvation for our day. We link the words together in one great testimony of eternal truth; and the reason we have power to bear witness of Christ, through whom salvation comes, is that Joseph Smith, the prophet and seer of the Lord for our day and in our day, has received eternal truth, has borne witness, has given revelation, has laid the foundation.

Brigham Young once said, “I feel like shouting Hallelujah, all the time, when I think that I ever knew Joseph Smith” (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 458); and that is as it ought to be, because salvation is in Christ and salvation is available because Joseph Smith revealed Christ to the world. The world either accepts that witness and believes in the Lord’s prophets or goes its way and at its peril loses the hope of

eternal salvation. One must believe in Adam and Christ, if living in that day; or in Abraham and Christ, if living in that day; or in Moses and Christ if living then; or, in our day, in Joseph Smith and Jesus Christ, crying “Hosanna” and “Hallelujah” and “Praise the Lord” whenever their names are mentioned by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I am grateful beyond any measure of expression I have that in my soul there rests the absolute, certain conviction that Jesus is the Lord. I know that as well as I know anything in this world. In that same sense—with unshaken certainty and absolute, pure, revealed knowledge—I know that Joseph Smith, Junior, who headed this dispensation, as the Lord’s prophet for our day and our time; and that, as he certified, he saw in the spring of 1820 the Father and the Son; and that, as he certified, the revelations and the truths that fell from his lips are the voice and mind and will and purposes of the Lord for me and for all men in our day.

I pray God our Father that we may be valiant and true, that we may stand affirmatively and courageously in bearing witness of Christ—because salvation is in Christ and in none other—and that we will have the same fervor and the same devotion in linking the mighty and noble name of the head of our dispensation with the name of the Savior himself.

This I do by way of doctrine and by way of testimony on this occasion in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.