

ROBERT L. MILLET

1843

*Doctrines, Covenants,
and Sweet Consolation.*

*W*hen Aaron and Miriam allowed themselves to be embroiled in a critical spirit in regard to their brother Moses, Jehovah declared, “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” (Numbers 12:6–8). We learn from this exchange an important principle: there are prophets, and then there are prophets. The Apostle Paul explained that “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets” (1 Corinthians 14:32). There is an order,

Robert L. Millet is a professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

a hierarchy, even among those called as chosen oracles and mouthpieces of the Almighty.

Jesus Christ is the presiding High Priest. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that after Christ in the government of the kingdom of God comes Adam and then Noah.¹ Elder Bruce R. McConkie observed, “You start out with the Lord Jesus, and then you have Adam and Noah. Thereafter come the dispensation heads. Then you step down, appreciably, and come to prophets and apostles, to the elders of Israel, and to wise and good and sagacious men who have the spirit of light and understanding.”² Joseph Smith, like Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, stands as a dispensation head. The dispensation head becomes the means by which the knowledge and power of God are channeled to men and women on earth. He becomes the means by which the gospel of Jesus Christ—the plan of salvation and exaltation—is revealed anew, the means by which divine transforming powers, including saving covenants and ordinances, are extended to people during an age of time. The dispensation head stands as the preeminent prophetic witness and revealer of Christ; he knows firsthand because of what he has seen and heard.

Because of his central place in the plan and because it is by means of the power of his testimony that men and women come to know the Lord and bask in the light of the Spirit, men and women of a particular dispensation who stand to express the witness which burns in their bosoms find themselves bearing testimony of Christ and of the dispensation head—the revealer of Christ—in almost the same breath. This is just as it should be. Elder McConkie thus pointed out, “Every prophet is a witness of Christ; every dispensation head is a revealer of Christ for his day; and every other prophet or apostle who comes is a reflection and an echo and an exponent of the

dispensation head. All such come to echo to the world and to expound and unfold what God has revealed through the man who was appointed for that era to give his eternal word to the world. Such is the dispensation concept.”³

Thus the Savior affirmed to Joseph Smith, “This generation shall have my word through you” (Doctrine and Covenants 5:10). Thomas B. Marsh was instructed to “declare glad tidings of great joy unto this generation.” And what did that entail? “You shall declare the things which have been revealed to my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun.” (Doctrine and Covenants 31:3–4). If the knowledge and power of God are to be had in this final period of the earth’s history, they will be had through the work set in motion and the truths which flowed and the authorities which were transmitted by Joseph Smith, or they will be had not at all. To bear witness that Joseph Smith is a prophet or seer is to testify that he was a revealer of truth, divine truth, and that he was a legal administrator, a conduit by which the keys of the kingdom of God have been restored.

President Joseph F. Smith, nephew of the Prophet, declared, “I believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, because more than ever I have come nearer the possession of the actual knowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, through the testimony of Joseph Smith . . . that he saw Him, that he heard Him, that he received instructions from Him, that he obeyed those instructions, and that he today stands before the world as the last great, actual, living, witness of the divinity of Christ’s mission and [Christ’s] power to redeem man. . . . Thank God for Joseph Smith.”⁴

Teachings in 1843

My task is to discuss the work of Joseph Smith in the year 1843. I will first mention a sampling of the things revealed to

him or that he taught during that significant year, and then I will focus more closely on three matters of deep doctrinal import.

It is appropriate that on January 1, the *History of the Church* records, “If any person should ask me if I were a prophet, I should not deny it, as that would give me the lie; for, according to John, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy; therefore, if I profess to be a witness or teacher, and have not the spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus, I must be a false witness; . . . and any man who says he is a teacher or preacher of righteousness, and denies the spirit of prophecy, is a liar.”⁵ On February 8 he explained that “a prophet [is] a prophet only when he [is] acting as such.”⁶

On Sunday, January 22, the Prophet Joseph spoke on what it takes to set up the kingdom of God, including priesthood and the call of legal administrators.⁷ One week later he spoke on the greatness of John the Baptist as a legal administrator and how to discern the interpretation of parables, using the parable of the prodigal son as an illustration.

The February 1 issue of the *Times and Seasons* contains Joseph’s poetic version of the Vision of the Glories (based on Doctrine and Covenants section 76), a colorful, thoughtful, and doctrinally significant rewrite of a monumental vision he had received some eleven years earlier.⁸

Parley P. Pratt had been away on missionary service and missed some of the instruction the Twelve had received during that time. Thus on February 9 Joseph spent time conversing with Elder Pratt on how to discern spirits and angels (resurrected beings), giving what we now have as section 129 of the Doctrine and Covenants.⁹

On February 28 Joseph read in the *Chicago Express* that a man had reported seeing the “sign of the Son of Man.” The Prophet replied that whatever the man may have seen, it was

not the sign spoken of in the Savior's Olivet discourse (see Matthew 24:30). Why? Because he, Joseph Smith, knew nothing concerning it, and, according to the prophetic word, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).¹⁰

On March 4 he wrote what is one of my favorite maxims, one that teaches us something about his cheerful personality: "On returning to my office after dinner, I spoke the following proverb: For a man to be great, he must not dwell on small things, though he may enjoy them; this shows that a Prophet cannot well be his own scribe, but must have some one to write for him." Following that light comment, he added: "The battle of Gog and Magog will be after the millennium."¹¹

On March 2 at 10:00 a.m. (*The Words of Joseph Smith* has this as April 2), the Prophet went to a meeting where Orson Hyde spoke on Christ appearing at the time of his Second Coming as a warrior riding on a horse, and on how each of us can have the Father and the Son dwell in our hearts. "We dined with my sister Sophronia McCleary, when I told Elder Hyde that I was going to offer some corrections to his sermon this morning. He replied, 'They shall be thankfully received.'" Joseph then spoke and delivered what we now have as the first seventeen verses of section 130 of the Doctrine and Covenants, explaining that when the Savior appears he will appear as a man, and that the idea of the Father and Son dwelling in our hearts is "an old sectarian notion, and is false" (v. 3). Later that day, instructions that constitute verses 18–23 of section 130 were given.¹²

Also on April 2, William Clayton's diary contains the following interesting insight: "The Holy Ghost is a personage, and a person cannot have the personage of the H. G. in his heart."¹³

The following is recorded under Friday, April 7:

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

To a remark of Elder Orson Pratt's, that a man's body changes every seven years, President Joseph Smith replied: There is no fundamental principle belonging to a human system that ever goes into another in this world or in the world to come; I care not what the theories of men are. We have the testimony that God will raise us up, and he has the power to do it. If any man supposes that any part of our bodies, that is, the fundamental parts thereof, ever goes into another body, he is mistaken.¹⁴

In the morning session of a conference on April 8, Joseph offered a remarkable commentary on the book of Revelation, including some guiding principles on understanding this kind of apocalyptic literature.¹⁵

On Sunday, May 21, Joseph Smith provided his now-classic characterization of himself: "I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, striking with accelerated force against religious bigotry, priestcraft, lawyer-craft, doctor-craft, lying editors, suborned judges and jurors, and the authority of perjured executives, backed by mobs, blasphemers, licentious and corrupt men and women—all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus will I become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty."¹⁶

James Burgess recorded the following on May 6:

In the month of May 1843. Several miles east of Nauvoo. The Nauvoo Legion was on parade and review. At the close of which Joseph Smith made some remarks upon our condition as a people and upon our future prospects, contrasting our present condition with our past trials and persecutions by the hands of our enemies. Also upon the constitution and

government of the United States, stating that the time would come when the Constitution and Government would hang [hang] by a brittle thread and would be ready to fall into other hands, but this people, the Latter-day Saints, would step forth and save it.¹⁷

According to the journals of Willard Richards and Wilford Woodruff, the Prophet explained on Sunday, June 11, that the grand purpose, the ultimate objective behind the gathering of the Saints, was to build temples, “whereby He could reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom.” In that same sermon Joseph spoke of the importance of baptism for the dead, the nature of the spirit world, the suffering in hell, and of the meaning of the Savior’s words to the thief on the cross, “This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”¹⁸ Willard Richards also recorded the following from Joseph: “At one time God obtained a house where Peter washed and anointed on the day of Pentecost.”¹⁹

On July 9, Joseph responded to the question, “Why is it this babbling gains so many followers, and retains them?” He answered, “It is because I possess the principle of love. All I can offer the world is a good heart and a good hand.”²⁰ Exactly two weeks later the Prophet added, “Friendship is one of the grand fundamental principles of ‘Mormonism’: [it is designed] to revolutionize and civilize the world, and cause wars and contentions to cease and men to become friends and brothers. . . . It is a time-honored adage that love begets love.”²¹

Also on July 9, he explained that he was just as eager to fight for and uphold “the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist or a good man of any denomination” to worship as he pleases. Why? “The same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter-day Saints would trample upon the rights of

the Roman Catholics, or of any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves.”²²

In the same address Joseph provides insight that would make a real difference in how we relate to those of other faiths today: “The inquiry is frequently made of me, ‘Wherein do you differ from others in your religious views?’ In reality and essence we do not differ so far in our religious views, but that we could all drink into one principle of love. One of the grand fundamental principles of ‘Mormonism’ is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may.” Continuing, he advised, “If I esteem mankind to be in error, shall I bear them down? No. I will lift them up, and in their own way too, if I cannot persuade them my way is better; and I will not seek to compel any man to believe as I do, only by the force of reasoning, for truth will cut its own way. Do you believe in Jesus Christ and the Gospel of salvation which He revealed? So do I. Christians should cease wrangling and contending with each other, and cultivate the principle of union and friendship in their midst.”²³

On July 16, Joseph taught the following, as recorded by James Burgess: “After God had created the heavens and the earth, he came down and on the sixth day said, Let us make man in our own image. In whose image? In the image of Gods created they them, male and female: innocent, harmless, and spotless, bearing the same character and the same image as the Gods. And when man fell he did not lose his image but his character, still retain[ing] the image of his Maker.”²⁴

On October 9, a conference was held, and during his sermon Joseph Smith paid tribute to Judge James Adams, who had passed away recently:

All men know they must die. And it is important that we should understand the reasons and causes of our exposure to the vicissitudes of life and of death, and the designs

DOCTRINES, COVENANTS, AND SWEET CONSOLATION

and purposes of God in our coming into the world, our sufferings here, and our departure hence. What is the object of our coming into existence, then dying and falling away, to be here no more? It is but reasonable to suppose that God would reveal something in reference to the matter, and it is a subject we ought to study more than any other. . . . If we have any claim on our Heavenly Father for anything, it is for knowledge on this important subject. . . . Reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. Knowledge of these things can only be obtained by experience through the ordinances of God set forth for that purpose. Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject.

Joseph went on to explain how spirits and angels are often allowed to witness our actions on earth and how they may minister to us.²⁵

On October 15, Willard Richards recorded the following from the Prophet: "I believe the bible, as it ought to be, as it came from the pen of the original writers."²⁶ In that same sermon, Joseph offered brief but poignant commentary on the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3: "It is one thing to see the kingdom of God, and another thing to be in it. We must have a change of heart to see the kingdom of God, and subscribe the articles of adoption [the first principles and ordinances, the means whereby we are adopted into the family of the Lord Jesus Christ] to enter therein."²⁷

Now, because of my own interests in doctrine, I have chosen not to emphasize trials and arrests and writs of habeas corpus and minutes of meetings and everyday affairs, although those matters were going on at the same time that Joseph Smith

was inviting the Saints to gaze with him upon the visions of eternity. The revelations of God, and the prophetic counsel that directed the Church in its destined course and that served as marvelous puzzle pieces to the grand plan of salvation, did not come to us in a vacuum, in the solitary places or in monasteries, but amid the comings and goings of noble men and women, busily engaged in earning a living as well as learning line upon line how to live and what to live for.

In moving through 1843 I have purposely skipped three doctrinal matters that were either introduced or expanded upon that year and will now deal with them in a bit more detail. These sacred matters are distinctively Latter-day Saint doctrines.

Eternal Marriage

Because of Joseph Smith and the authority restored to him, we know that the family unit will be preserved throughout the eternities. Thus love truly becomes eternal, and the privilege of fatherhood and motherhood continues through all generations of time.

We know from historical sources that Joseph Smith first learned of eternal marriage (as well as plural marriage) in 1831, during the time that he was engaged in his inspired translation of the Bible. But it was not until July 12, 1843, that the revelation we know as section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants was recorded. The early brethren took seriously the commission of the Lord given in November 1831: “And of as many as the Father shall bear record, to you shall be given power to seal them up unto eternal life” (Doctrine and Covenants 68:12). Indeed, the records indicate that entire congregations were so sealed.²⁸ Elijah had come to the Kirtland Temple in April of 1836 and restored the keys associated with sealing powers and the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood, an invitation

and direction to bind mothers and fathers, sons and daughters together forever (see D&C 110:13–15).²⁹

The doctrine and practice of eternal marriage within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is so prevalent, almost so common, that we often do not take the time to reflect seriously upon what a treasure, what a pearl of great price, we have in our midst. Consider this unsatisfying statement by a very dedicated modern Evangelical pastor-teacher:

The question I'm most often asked about heaven is, "*Will I be married to the same spouse in heaven?*" Most are saying, "I don't want to lose my relationship with my wife; I can't imagine going to heaven and not being married to her." (Others, however, may be secretly hoping for a different answer. I'm not certain why so many ask this one!) . . .

Marriage and other business of this life can sometimes intrude on more important matters of eternal concern. Paul writes, "He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife" (1 Cor. 7:32–33). So if you can remain single, do. Concentrate on the things of the Lord, because marriage is only a temporary provision. . . .

While married couples are heirs together of the grace of *this* life (cf. 1 Peter 3:7), the institution of marriage is passing away. There are higher eternal values. . . .

But what are those of us who are happily married supposed to think of this? I love my wife. She's my best friend and my dearest companion in every area of life. If those are your thoughts about your spouse as well, don't despair! You will enjoy an eternal companionship in heaven that is more perfect than any earthly partnership. The difference is that you will have such a perfect relationship with every other

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

person in heaven as well. If having such a deep relationship with your spouse here is so wonderful, imagine how glorious it will be to enjoy a perfect relationship with every human in the whole expanse of heaven—forever!³⁰

Joseph Smith placed all things in proper perspective. He helped us see that some things matter more than others, that family life, family associations, and family love matter more than fame and fortune, more than intellectual acclaim, more than the acquisition of this world's goods. Elder Parley P. Pratt wrote:

It was at this time [in Philadelphia in 1839] that I received from [Joseph Smith] the first idea of eternal family organization, and the eternal union of the sexes in those inexpressibly endearing relationships which none but the highly intellectual, the refined and pure in heart, know how to prize, and which are at the very foundation of everything worthy to be called happiness.

Till then I had learned to esteem kindred affections and sympathies as appertaining solely to this transitory state, as something from which the heart must be entirely weaned, in order to be fitted for its heavenly state.

It was Joseph Smith who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter.

It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. It was from him that I learned that we might cultivate these affections, and grow and increase in the same to all eternity. . . .

DOCTRINES, COVENANTS, AND SWEET CONSOLATION

I had loved before, but I knew not why. But now I loved—with a pureness an intensity of elevated, exalted feeling, which would lift my soul from the transitory things of this grovelling sphere and expand it as the ocean. I felt that God was my heavenly Father indeed; that Jesus was my brother, and that the wife of my bosom was an immortal, eternal companion; a kind ministering angel, given to me as a comfort, and a crown of glory for ever and ever. In short, I could now love with the spirit and with the understanding also.³¹

On Tuesday, May 16, the Prophet placed his hand upon the knee of his secretary and scribe, William Clayton, and said: “Your life is his with Christ in God, and so are many others. Nothing but the unpardonable sin can prevent you from inheriting eternal life for you are sealed up by the power of the Priesthood unto eternal life, having taken the step necessary for that purpose.”³² The Prophet went on to say: “Except a man and his wife enter into an everlasting covenant and be married for eternity, while in this probation, by the power and authority of the Holy Priesthood, they will cease to increase when they die; that is, they will not have any children after the resurrection.”³³ Then follows what we know as Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4, the explanation that the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, what we call exaltation, will come only to those who enter into and keep the terms and conditions of the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.

More Sure Word of Prophecy

Because of the teachings of Joseph Smith, we understand that we can receive the assurance of eternal life. We can know that our lives are on course, that we are in covenant, in Christ,

and bound for celestial glory. Early in his ministry, Joseph Smith taught that as men and women live in such a way as to cultivate the gift and gifts of the Holy Ghost, they eventually receive the assurance of eternal life—they make their calling and election sure. “After a person has faith in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized for the remission of his sins and receives the Holy Ghost (by the laying on of hands), which is the first Comforter, then let him continue to humble himself before God, and the Lord will soon say unto him, Son, thou shalt be exalted. When the Lord has thoroughly proved him, and finds that the man is willing to serve Him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and his election made sure.”³⁴ That is, the Lord seals an exaltation upon him, seals him up unto eternal life. In receiving the promise of salvation, the individual has thereby passed the tests of mortality and qualified for exaltation and glory hereafter.

On May 14, 1843, Wilford Woodruff recorded a sermon by Brother Joseph in which he explained Peter’s words in his second epistle that the Apostles who ascended the Mount of Transfiguration possess a “more sure word of prophecy”: “Though they might hear the voice of God and know that Jesus was the Son of God, this would be no evidence that their election and calling was made sure, that they had part with Christ, and were joint heirs with Him. They then would want that more sure word of prophecy, that they were sealed in the heavens and had the promise of eternal life in the kingdom of God [see Doctrine and Covenants 131:5–6]. Then, having this promise sealed unto them, it was an anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast. . . . Then I would exhort you to go on and continue to call upon God until you make your calling and election sure for yourselves, by obtaining this more sure word of prophecy, and wait patiently for the promise until you obtain it.”³⁵

In the fall of 1843, Joseph Smith began to confer upon men and women the fullness of the blessings of the priesthood. “Those holding the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings and priests of the Most High God,” Joseph explained, “holding the keys of power and blessings. In fact, that priesthood is a perfect law of theocracy, and stands as God to give laws to the people, administering endless lives to the sons and daughters of Adam. Abraham says to Melchizedek, I believe all that thou hast taught me concerning the priesthood and the coming of the Son of Man; so Melchizedek ordained Abraham and sent him away. Abraham rejoiced, saying, Now I have a priesthood.”³⁶ James Burgess’s record of this sermon is as follows: “Abraham gave a tenth part of all his spoils and then received a blessing under the hands of Melchizedek, even the last law or a fulness of the law or priesthood, which constituted him [Abraham] a king and priest after the order of Melchizedek, or an endless life.”³⁷

Securing Families through the Covenant

Because of Joseph Smith and the powers exercised in holy temples, there is power in the new and everlasting covenant to secure families forever. That power transcends our finite capacity to fully understand an infinite God’s willingness and eternal plan to save all of those who will be saved. We know so little. In a world that presses for fairness, we too often close our eyes to the tender mercies of a loving Savior. The Master demonstrates his infinite mercy, for example, by refusing to condemn those who were ignorant of the gospel message and its requirements (see 2 Nephi 9:25–26; Mosiah 3:11; Moroni 8:22; Doctrine and Covenants 137:7–9), including little children who died before the age of accountability (see Mosiah 3:16; 15:25; Moroni 8:8–12, 22; Doctrine and Covenants 29:46–47;

74:7; 137:10). He offers the sublime gift—eternal life—to those laborers who join the work of the vineyard in the eleventh hour, the same gift he offers to those who have labored the entire day (see Matthew 20:1–16).

Speaking at a funeral for Judge Elias Higbee on August 13, 1843, the Prophet stated, “Had I inspiration, revelation, and lungs to communicate what my soul has contemplated in times past, there is not a soul in this congregation but would go to their homes and shut their mouths in everlasting silence on religion till they had learned something. Why be so certain that you comprehend the things of God, when all things with you are so uncertain. You are welcome to all the knowledge and intelligence I can impart to you.” After thus preparing us for what was to come, he continued, “That which hath been hid from before the foundation of the world is revealed to babes and sucklings in the last days. The world is reserved unto burning in the last days. He shall send Elijah the prophet, and he shall reveal the covenants of the fathers in relation to the children, and the covenants of the children in relation to the fathers.” He then referred to the four angels mentioned in Revelation 7, described in modern revelation as “four angels sent forth from God, to whom is given power over the four parts of the earth, to save life and to destroy; these are they who have the everlasting gospel to commit to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; having power to shut up the heavens, to seal up unto life, or to cast down to the regions of darkness” (Doctrine and Covenants 77:8; emphasis added). The Prophet then declared, “Four destroying angels holding power over the four quarters of the earth until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads, which signifies sealing the blessing upon their heads, meaning the everlasting covenant, thereby making their calling and election sure. When a seal is put upon the father

and mother, it secures their posterity, so that they cannot be lost, but will be saved by virtue of the covenant of their father and mother.”³⁸

Howard and Martha Coray recorded that same sermon as follows: “God shall send unto them Elijah the prophet and he shall reveal unto them the covenants of the fathers with relation to the children and the covenants of the children in relation to the Fathers, that they may have the privilege of entering into the same in order to effect their mutual salvation.”³⁹ President Franklin D. Richards recorded the Prophet’s words in the following manner: “Covenants either there or here must be made in view of eternity and the covenant sealed on the foreheads of the parents secured the children from falling, that they shall all sit upon thrones as one with the godhead, joint heirs of God with Jesus Christ.”⁴⁰

What does this mean? To what degree can righteous parents—fathers and mothers who have entered into and kept sacred covenants—affect or even effect the salvation of their posterity? President Brigham Young taught, “Let the father and mother, who are members of this Church and kingdom, take a righteous course, and strive with all their might never to do a wrong, but to do good all their lives; if they have one child or one hundred children, if they conduct themselves towards them as they should, binding them to the Lord by their faith and prayers, I care not where those children go, they are bound up to their parents by an everlasting tie, and no power on earth or hell can separate them from their parents in eternity; they will return again to the fountain from whence they sprang.”⁴¹ We think of the sufferings and pleadings of Alma the elder and his wife and remember the words of the angel to the wandering son: “Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father;

for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith” (Mosiah 27:14).

We believe that those who are faithful in their first estate come to the earth with certain predispositions to receive and embrace the truth. The Prophet himself declared that those of the house of Israel who come into the Church do so with quiet receptivity to the Spirit of the Lord and an openness to pure intelligence.⁴² Similarly, we have no difficulty speaking of the “spirit of Elijah” reaching out, touching, directing, and impelling individuals to search out their dead and perform the saving ordinances. Why should we have difficulty accepting the fact that the power of the covenant can reach out, touch, redirect, and impel the wandering sheep? Could it be that that power is indeed the same spirit of Elijah, the spirit that turns the hearts of the children to the covenant made with their fathers?

Elder Orson F. Whitney offered the following powerful commentary on Joseph Smith’s words:

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught more comforting doctrine—that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and

DOCTRINES, COVENANTS, AND SWEET CONSOLATION

forgiving father's heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God. . . .

You parents of the wilful and the wayward! Don't give them up. Don't cast them off. They are not utterly lost. The Shepherd will find his sheep. They were his before they were yours—long before he entrusted them to your care; and you cannot begin to love them as he loves them. They have but strayed in ignorance from the Path of Right, and God is merciful to ignorance. Only the fulness of knowledge brings the fulness of accountability. Our Heavenly Father is far more merciful, infinitely more charitable, than even the best of his servants, and the Everlasting Gospel is mightier in power to save than our narrow finite minds can comprehend.⁴³

In our own day, President Boyd K. Packer has provided a comforting context and reaffirmation for the promise to faithful parents. In discussing the “moral pollution” of the last days, he said:

It is a great challenge to raise a family in the darkening mists of our moral environment.

We emphasize that the greatest work you will do will be within the walls of your home, and that “no other success can compensate for failure in the home.” The measure of our success as parents, however, will not rest solely on how our children turn out. That judgment would be just only if we could raise our families in a perfectly moral environment, and that now is not possible.

It is not uncommon for responsible parents to lose one of their children, for a time, to influences over which they have no control. They agonize over rebellious sons and daughters.

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

They are puzzled over why they are so helpless when they have tried so hard to do what they should.

It is my conviction that those wicked influences one day will be overruled. . . .

We cannot overemphasize the value of temple marriage, the binding ties of the sealing ordinance, and the standards of worthiness required of them. When parents keep the covenants they have made at the altar of the temple, their children will be forever bound to them.⁴⁴

But doesn't the Prophet Joseph Smith's statement regarding the sealing of righteous parents seem to indicate that the parents' calling and election must be made sure? Latter-day Saints who have received the ordinances of salvation—including the blessings of the temple endowment and eternal marriage—may thus press forward in the work of the Lord and with quiet dignity and patient maturity seek to be worthy of gaining the certain assurance of salvation before the end of their mortal lives. But should they not formally receive the more sure word of prophecy in this life, they have the scriptural promise that faithfully enduring to the end—keeping the covenants and commandments from baptism to the end of their lives (see Mosiah 18:8–9)—eventuates in the promise of eternal life, whether that promise be received here or hereafter (see Doctrine and Covenants 14:7; 53:7; see also 2 Nephi 31:20; Mosiah 5:15). “But blessed are they who are faithful and endure, whether in life or in death, for they shall inherit eternal life” (Doctrine and Covenants 50:5).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie expressed the following sentiments at the funeral of Elder S. Dilworth Young: “If we die in the faith, that is the same thing as saying that our calling and election has been made sure and that we will go on to eternal reward hereafter. As far as faithful members of the Church are

concerned, they have charted a course leading to eternal life. This life is the time that is appointed as a probationary estate for men to prepare to meet God, and as far as faithful people are concerned, if they are in the line of their duty, if they are doing what they ought to do, although they may not have been perfect in this sphere, their probation is ended. Now there will be some probation for some other people hereafter. But for the faithful saints of God, now is the time and the day, and their probation is ended with their death.”⁴⁵

Amulek did teach that the same spirit or disposition we have in this life will be with us in the world to come (see Alma 34:31–35), and the principle is true enough. Continuing in an evil habituated course makes it awfully difficult to change. But is such impossible?

We must never deny another person the opportunity to change. People change here. Why can they not change hereafter? So many things can weigh upon the mind and heart of an individual, pressures and challenges and crosses that only God can see and comprehend. Why does a person reject the gospel? Why does a child wander? Can we see the whole picture? Are we in a position to pass appropriate judgment and close the doors to future recovery and reconciliation? I have a conviction that when a person passes through the veil of death, all of those impediments and challenges that were beyond his or her power to control—abuse, neglect, immoral environment, weighty traditions, and so on—will be torn away like a film. Then perhaps they will see and feel things that they could not see and feel before.

But isn't this teaching risky? Won't this kind of teaching motivate some young people to neglect their duty and sow their wild oats? I suppose there will always be those who choose to take license in gospel liberty or who do despite to

the saving grace of our Lord by knowingly violating the laws of God. There is always a risk on that end of the spectrum. There is, however, what I perceive to be a greater risk—that well-meaning, hardworking, and diligent mothers and fathers with straying children may draw false conclusions about themselves and maybe even throw in the towel in despair. To such persons, the prophetic word concerning the consummate power of the covenant is like manna to the soul, like living water to parched lips. It may also be the case that such doctrine is often more effectively delivered and applied in more intimate settings.

But is all of this really fair to those parents who have been successful in rearing their families or to those children who have kept themselves from serious sin? Stated bluntly, all of us are guilty of sin. All of us are in need of pardoning mercy. All of us fall short of the divine standard. During a long day of debate with his opponents, Jesus delivered the following parable: “A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He [the son] answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he [the second son] answered and said, I go sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father?” (Matthew 21:28–31). One “may wonder why Jesus does not include a third son who said, ‘I will’ and kept his word. Perhaps it is because this story characterizes humanity, and we all fall short. Thus Jesus could describe only two kinds of religious people: those who pretend to be obedient but are actually rebels, and those who begin as rebels but repent.”⁴⁶

Inasmuch as each of us is a recipient of unending and unmerited grace, how can we, in the spirit of Christian charity—or in the attitude of sane discourse—speak of the Lord’s pardoning mercy toward wayward children as *unfair*? Of course it’s unfair! It’s all unfair! That a pure and innocent man should suffer and

agonize over others' transgressions is not fair. That he who had never taken a backward step should tread the winepress alone, "even the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God" (Doctrine and Covenants 76:107) and thereby descend below all things (see Doctrine and Covenants 88:6), is not fair. That the lowly Nazarene should be subjected to the ignominy and unspeakable torture of crucifixion is definitely unfair. But the plan of the Father is not a plan of fairness, at least as we judge fairness from our limited perspective; it is a plan of mercy. The Father and the Son love us in ways that we cannot comprehend. They will do all that is within the bounds of propriety to save as many of the posterity of Adam and Eve as will be saved.

President Lorenzo Snow explained:

God has fulfilled his promises to us, and our prospects are grand and glorious. Yes, in the next life we will have our wives, and our sons and daughters. If we do not get them all at once, we will have them some time, for every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is the Christ. You that are mourning about your children straying away will have your sons and your daughters. If you succeed in passing through these trials and afflictions and receive a resurrection, you will, by the power of the Priesthood, work and labor, as the Son of God has, until you get all your sons and daughters in the path of exaltation and glory. This is just as sure as that the sun rose this morning over yonder mountains. Therefore, mourn not because all your sons and daughters do not follow in the path that you have marked out to them, or give heed to your counsels. Inasmuch as we succeed in securing eternal glory, and stand as saviors, and as kings and priests to our God, we will save our posterity. . . . God will have His own way in His own time, and He will accomplish His purposes in the salvation of His sons and

daughters. . . . God bless you, brethren and sisters. Do not be discouraged is the word I wish to pass to you; but remember that righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost is what you and I have the privilege of possessing at all times.⁴⁷

Conclusion

A prophet is first and foremost a witness of Christ (see Revelation 19:10). His competence as a witness is predicated on knowledge, that is, the extent to which he unveils the heavens and reveals the mind and will of the Almighty. He is then a revelator and a teacher; he reveals and teaches the principles of salvation. The message is not his own but the Father's who sent him. Yet the prophet must be a pure vessel in order that the message not be soiled. Of that which he taught, Joseph Smith said:

This is good doctrine. It tastes good. I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. They are given to me by the revelations of Jesus Christ; and I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life as they are given to me, you taste them, and I know that you believe them. You say honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life. I know it is good; and when I tell you of these things which were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and rejoice more and more.⁴⁸

It is in those teachings that we rejoice. As we study them, and teach them, and write about them, we find ourselves rejoicing "more and more." Their taste *is* sweet. They *are* light and truth. They lift the soul and expand the mind. They carry within them, as all truth does, the evidence of their own truthfulness. Separately and collectively they testify that Joseph Smith was a prophet. Of all that the Prophet taught we can but say: It tastes

good; it lifts the soul and enlightens the mind. I share my great love for the Prophet Joseph Smith. I desire to honor his name and his ministry, to be loyal to him. Through him I have come to know my Lord and Savior and to experience the sweet fruits that come only from living the gospel. It was the Lord Jesus himself who told the Prophet, “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” (Doctrine and Covenants 122:1–2). I desire to be numbered always among those who have sought counsel, authority, and blessings from under his hand. I do not worship Joseph Smith, for my worship is reserved for God. Such is the source of salvation. But I gladly sing praise to and express undying gratitude for the preeminent prophetic witness of the one who has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men and women, than any man who ever lived (see Doctrine and Covenants 135:3).

Elder Wilford Woodruff said of his beloved prophet-leader: “There is not so great a man as Joseph standing in this generation. The gentiles look upon him, and he is like a bed of gold, concealed from human view. They know not his principles, his wisdom, his virtue, his calling. His mind, like Enoch’s, expands as eternity, and only God can comprehend his soul.”⁴⁹

Notes

1. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 157.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, “This Generation Shall Have My Word through You,” in *Hearken, O Ye People: Discourses on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Sandy, UT: Randall Book, 1984), 4.

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

3. McConkie, "This Generation Shall Have My Word," 4–5.
4. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 495.
5. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 5:215.
6. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:265.
7. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:256–59.
8. *Times and Seasons*, February 1, 1843, 82–85.
9. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:267.
10. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:290–91; see also 337 on the sign of the Son of Man.
11. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:298.
12. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:323; see also 336.
13. *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 170; in all quotations from this source, I have modernized spelling and punctuation.
14. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:339.
15. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:339–45.
16. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:401.
17. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 279.
18. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:423–25.
19. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 211.
20. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:498.
21. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:517.
22. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:498.
23. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:499.
24. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 231.
25. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:50–52.
26. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 256.
27. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 256.

DOCTRINES, COVENANTS, AND SWEET CONSOLATION

28. See examples in Hyrum L. Andrus, *Principles of Perfection* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 346–52.
29. *History of the Church*, 6:251.
30. John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Glory of Heaven: The Truth about Heaven, Angels, and Eternal Life* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 135–38.
31. *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 297–98.
32. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:391.
33. Smith, *Teachings*, 300–301.
34. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:380–81.
35. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:388–89.
36. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:555.
37. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 246.
38. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:530.
39. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 240.
40. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 241.
41. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 11:215.
42. Smith, *Teachings*, 149–50.
43. Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, April 1929, 110.
44. Boyd K. Packer, “Our Moral Environment,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 66.
45. Bruce R. McConkie, funeral service for S. Dilworth Young, July 13, 1981, typescript, 5.
46. John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 183–84.
47. Lorenzo Snow, address delivered on October 6, 1893, in *Collected Discourses*, 3:364–65.
48. Smith, *Teachings*, 355.
49. Wilford Woodruff, *Journal History of the Church*, entry for April 9, 1837, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.



Oil on canvas. William W. Major captures details in the faces of this group of Mormon leaders: Hyrum Smith, Willard Richards, Joseph Smith, Orson Pratt, Parley Parker Pratt, Orson Hyde, Heber Chase Kimball, and Brigham Young.