

## ELDER JOSEPH F. MERRILL

*Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles*

Brethren, sisters and friends—those listening here and elsewhere: I propose in the few minutes allotted to me to talk primarily to the Mormon people, but I would feel complimented if any others would care to listen. It is trite to say that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has many characteristic teachings—those not accepted and taught by other churches as we teach them. Some of these are basic and therefore fundamental to Mormonism, as you all know. Among them are that Joseph Smith was the recipient of divine visions, visitations, and revelations, that the Book of Mormon is a God-given volume to the world which, by reason of the miraculous way it came forth, is the most marvelous book in print today and that the Holy Priesthood—the authority to act for and in the name of Jesus Christ—was given to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery by the laying on of hands of heavenly messengers—first, John the Baptist, and a little later, the Apostles Peter, James, and John. To members of our Church these are actual facts to which countless thousands of them bear fervent testimony, saying in effect they really *do know*, not believe only, that these things are true. Incidentally, may I say testimony bearing of this nature is, as you know, a characteristic practice among us.

## TESTIMONIES OF RETURNED MISSIONARIES

Since the current policy of interviewing returned missionaries by some one of the General Authorities began a dozen years ago, I have interviewed hundreds of these young people and on questioning, at least ninety-nine percent of them readily and positively declared they knew certainly that God lives and that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is his Church. Were these young people telling the truth? Did they, and can any one, positively know that God lives? Multitudes of worldly people answer, nay. But in such a case a negative answer has no value. All it can do is to show that the witness is without knowledge. The testimony of a single witness who has the facts far outweighs the testimony of the multitudes who have no facts. We read that Jesus once declared:

My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. (John 7:16-17.)

Further, on one occasion addressing the question to his disciples, Jesus asked:

But whom say ye that I am?

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon

Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. (Matt. 16:15-17.)

The Latter-day Saints accept this teaching, and multitudes among them declare they know by personal experience that it is the truth. "But how can they know?" the doubter asks. Those having the knowledge rarely, if ever, claim they have ever seen or heard God. (But the boy Joseph Smith asserted that he both saw and heard.) "Then how can they know?" the doubter asks. The answer is: by the power of the Holy Ghost, as Moroni declared. (See Moroni 10:4-5.) Was it not by the power of the Holy Ghost that Peter got his knowledge?

#### AVENUES OF GETTING KNOWLEDGE

There are avenues of getting knowledge other than those of seeing, hearing, or touching. One of them is mind and feeling. If one has a pain, does he not know it? How? Through his feelings. If he is elated, or sad, or depressed, or hungry, does he not know it? It is through our feelings that much of our knowledge comes. In his work of translating the Book of Mormon, how did the Prophet Joseph Smith know when a particular translation was correct? By a "burning" in his bosom, he declared—that is, by a feeling of perfect assurance.

Many a prayer has been divinely answered while the petitioner was still on his knees. How did he know the answer came from above? By the way he felt—the feeling of satisfaction, of elation, of perfect assurance, of right accompanying the mental impressions received. But it is well for us to remember that mental impressions may come from two different sources—one from above, the other from below—from the Lord, or from Satan. We may know the source of the impression by the way we feel. If it is from the devil, it is never accompanied by a feeling of joyous satisfaction and positive assurance of right—a characteristic of impressions that come from the Lord. The one who prays need not be deceived by impressions that come into his mind in answer to prayer. Divine impressions have accompanying characteristics of genuineness.

#### VISION GIVEN TO JOSEPH SMITH

Yes, God does live. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three separate personal beings, alike in form, in whose image man is made. In order that these basic fundamental truths, lost to the world through centuries of erroneous teachings, might again be available to people of our day, a new revelation was necessary, and this was given to the fourteen-year-old Joseph Smith in the form of the most glorious vision ever given to mortal man, so far as the records indicate—a vision in which Father and Son appeared simultaneously—given to this uneducated, backwoods boy in order ". . . that I might show forth my wisdom through the weak things

of the earth" (D. & C. 124:1) — a youth who three and one-half years later was told by a messenger from heaven that his name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues. Yes, Joseph Smith was divinely called, a truth to which his works and the personal testimony of hundreds of thousands of his followers sincerely testify. And judged solely by his works—the measuring stick universally employed in determining greatness in men—Joseph Smith surely presents a challenge to every normal-minded adult human being interested in the good and happiness of himself and fellowmen, a challenge to give careful study and thorough investigation to his claims and teachings. Personally, I believe that even very many of our Mormon people are more or less careless and indifferent to the significance of the message Joseph Smith was called to deliver to the world.

### SATAN RESPONSIBLE FOR WORLD TROUBLES

In this connection, it is perhaps well to remind ourselves that Satan the devil, whom I mentioned a moment ago, is a real personal being, a spirit brother of ours with a spirit body in form like that of all other men. He is here on earth with a multitude of other spirit children of our Father in heaven. He and his hosts are doing all they can to handicap the work of the Lord by handicapping the Father's children here in mortality. All our troubles, sorrows, miseries, sins, and wickedness stem right back to Satan, who through his temptations and machinations leads men away from the paths of peace, fair dealing, and righteous living, from the love of God and love of their fellow mortals.

When traveling about Europe twelve to fifteen years ago, we frequently met people who said, "There is no God who loves us and whose children we are; otherwise, he never would have permitted the First World War, entailing misery and destruction to many millions of human beings." Of course the answer of Mormonism to such false conclusions is that Satan, and not God, is responsible in the final analysis for these troubles. To every child that comes into mortality our Father in heaven has given his free agency—freedom to do as he pleases, freedom to yield to the temptations and power of Satan, freedom to reject God and righteousness. These matters are fairly well understood by Latter-day Saints, but not by many of their non-Mormon brethren. Yes, Satan is the father of lies, the inspiration of wickedness, and the source of wars. Years ago a great newspaper in the Middle West entitled its lead editorial "Hitler, the Devil Incarnate." God works through men willing to obey him, to lead his mortal children to paths of righteousness. Likewise, Satan works through men willing to yield to temptations, to bring troubles and destruction to God's children. Whether we serve God or Satan is a matter for the individual to decide. But having given each person his free

agency, God holds him responsible for the way he uses it—whether for the good and uplift, or otherwise, of his fellow men.

### THE POWER OF SATAN

Relative to Satan, perhaps he has more influence among men today than ever before in human history. We have yet no treaty of peace with Germany or Japan, and none as yet in sight, though fighting with these countries ended more than three years ago. In the First World War, Armistice Day came the 11th of November. In the following June a treaty of peace with Germany was signed. What is the trouble now? My answer is Satan. I think the leaders of certain nations who have a voice in making treaties are in the power of Satan. And Satan does not want peace. The more trouble, fighting, and wickedness in the world, the more Satan laughs. How childish, weak, and stupid many of us are! We yield more or less readily to our destroyer, both in matters that affect us in person and in mass. But Russia is wholly atheistic. In all the public schools there, from the kindergarten to the university, the children are taught the Satanic doctrine that there is no God. The "law of the jungle" rules in government circles. When will treaties of peace conformable to Christian standards, in the making of which Russia has a voice, become effective in Germany and Japan?

But we need not look abroad to see troubles and unchristian conduct. We have plenty in our beloved America. But whether in our country or abroad, the ultimate cause is the same—the influence of Satan. And this influence is largely manifested through a universal human trait—that of selfishness. Have not all the major wars of history been due to selfishness, especially when associated with the similar traits of ambition and greed? The Christian rule of conduct is indicated by the second great commandment: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." If you do this, then necessarily you treat your neighbor as you would like to be treated in similar circumstances. In other words, you observe the Golden Rule, a thing so difficult to do that perhaps no one fully succeeds in doing it. But the rule expresses the Christian ideal. If this ideal, even approximately, motivated the makers of international treaties, peace between nations would soon be here—the great desideratum of the vast majority of the people of every country.

### DEVIL-INSPIRED TROUBLES

Now in our own country what do we see? A multitude of devil-inspired troubles, most of them having their roots in uncontrolled and excessive selfishness, exhibited by excessive prices of necessities, work stoppages, strikes, mass picketing, lockouts, crimes, and indulgence in sinful practices, pressure groups making inordinate demands, struggles to get something for nothing—to name only a few of them. Unless America wakes up to the grave dangers of

the trend of the times and takes steps to curb and eliminate these evils, her doom is sealed as a land of free, prosperous, and happy people. This land is to continue as a "choice land above all other lands," (words divinely spoken) only on condition of the righteousness of her inhabitants.

Latter-day Saints will observe that I have said nothing new—nothing that they do not already know. But my purpose in saying these things is to call them again to our attention. In obedience to the divine will given to us by revelation, we partake weekly of the emblems of the Holy Sacrament as a reminder and for a renewal of our covenants. The Lord knows we have very good forgetters; he knows we need to be frequently reminded.

#### REPENTANCE NEEDED

Brethren and sisters, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we need to repent of sinful worldly practices in which many of us indulge more or less. We need to bring our selfish desires and practices within the limits of the Golden Rule. We need to cultivate humility and do more sincere praying, particularly in our family circles. We need to keep more vividly in mind the commandments of the Lord and with more determination increase our efforts to govern our lives accordingly, that is, implement these commandments in our daily living.

Everyone of us has more or less influence with those who see and know how we act, how we live. And since we are all expected to be missionaries and teach the gospel of Christ our Lord to all the world, we should keep in mind the fact that in the long run the most effective way the majority of us can do this is by example. We are all familiar with the old saying, "I would rather see a sermon than hear one"—a very natural attitude to take. With the Apostle James we teach that faith without works is dead and that in the great day of judgment we shall be judged according to our works.

#### OBSERVANCE OF SABBATH DAY

In this connection may I mention the Fourth Commandment which enjoins us to keep holy the Sabbath day—a commandment so frequently violated by multitudes of people, even by some of our own people. Whatever non-members may do in violation of this holy day does not justify us in any degree whatsoever in doing likewise on this day. We cannot go to movies, or ball games, or other kinds of commercial entertainments. We may not go hunting, or fishing, or golfing, on the Sabbath without violating the holiness of the day—such is a doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ as we interpret it, notwithstanding the teachings of some professing Christians to the contrary. The Lord has spoken in modern days on this subject.

I have spoken of some characteristic teachings of the Church

of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In addition we have some teachings that are at the basis of every acceptable Christian life. Some of these are indicated in the Thirteenth Article of Faith:

We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men. . . .

Brethren and sisters, God has again showed himself and spoken to man in modern times. He is a personal being in whose image we, his children are made both in the spirit and the flesh. This is his Church, the only one on earth that he recognizes as his own, a truth that we declare not boastfully but in humility, very thankful that we have been given eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to feel, and minds to understand.

God help us all to accept and continue loyal and faithful to these truths I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### ELDER RICHARD L. EVANS

#### *Of the First Council of the Seventy*

Somehow or other, this task never seems to become any easier. In fact at times I feel that it becomes more difficult, and I earnestly hope that you will sustain me with your thoughts and prayers and that my Father in heaven will give me utterance.

#### TESTIMONY OF INFORMED WITNESS

I was struck by a thought that Dr. Merrill presented in the opening paragraphs of his talk, that the testimony of one informed witness is worth infinitely more than the testimony of many who don't know. I have often made the observation that an idiotic opinion multiplied by fifty million is still an idiotic opinion. Sometimes our children endeavor to induce us to give them permission to do things we know they shouldn't do, with the well-worn phrase that "everybody is doing them."

But no matter what everybody does, an error is still an error even though it is multiplied millions of times. So is an evil, and it doesn't matter how popular or how glamorous or how universal evils become, they are still evils. Some evils have been made very glamorous, very appealing and very popular, but we must be aware of the fact that they are still what they are, regardless of who partakes of them or what they are called, or what appearance they assume. History has proved many times over that the opinion of one man who knows and who knows that he knows, the opinion of one man who has the truth and proclaims it, is much more important than the opinions of many millions who don't know.

#### EVENTS OF A CENTURY AGO

I can't look at this audience this morning without thinking of