

Joseph Smith was born of humble parentage in an obscure village. He never went to college nor attended high school, but he accomplished in the short period of his life of thirty-eight and one-half years more than any other mortal man of his time, if not of all time. Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were martyrs to the truth. They were murdered in cold blood by a disguised and ruthless mob.

During the short life of the Prophet Joseph Smith he was instrumental in the hands of the Lord in the establishment of the Church and kingdom of God on earth as seen in vision by the Prophet Daniel. Through him the everlasting gospel in its fulness was restored, with all its gifts, blessings, principles, and ordinances, and the power and authority of the priesthood to administer the ordinances of the gospel to the children of men, who, by repentance and obedience, are prepared to receive them.

The works of Joseph Smith and the spirit that prompted them live on in the hearts and lives of his followers who are numbered by the hundreds of thousands now living and have influenced the lives of other hundreds of thousands who have gone to their reward.

More than a century has passed since the martyrdom of the Prophet, but his works and the spirit which actuated them are increasing in the earth. Many have died for the religion established by the Prophet Joseph Smith, and there are many thousands today who would do likewise if necessary. He gave his life for the cause and, like the Savior, sealed his testimony with his blood.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

As a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, I bear you my testimony that God the Eternal Father lives, a glorified and exalted being, having a body of flesh, bones, and spirit as tangible as man's, and that he has revealed himself anew to the world through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph Smith, whom he raised up to be the mighty Prophet of the last days; that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior and Redeemer of the world; that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of the Living God; and that the work in which we, as Latter-day Saints, are engaged is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which all men must receive if they would be saved in the kingdom of God.

I bear this testimony to you and to all the world, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

ELDER THORPE B. ISAACSON

Second Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric

President Smith, and my dear brothers and sisters, the other day as we were attempting to guess our time when we would be called

upon to speak, Bishop Wirthlin spoke and said: "No man knoweth the day nor the hour," and he was not referring to the original passage of scripture, either.

GRATITUDE FOR CHOIR

I know we are all grateful for this choir today. I thought this morning when President McKay was giving the number of missionaries in the field, probably the choir should be included. The men of the choir furnished our music last night at the general priesthood meeting, and it was very beautiful, and this morning again their songs have been so appropriate. The choir comes here each week, each Thursday evening, and each Sunday morning early to practise. I am confident that we are all very proud of them. They are a choir of service. They are indeed a missionary choir, and I know we are grateful to the conductor, Brother J. Spencer Cornwall, and the fine organists and all the members of the choir, Brother Lester F. Hewlett, the president, and all those who are associated with him. We cannot think of the choir on Sunday morning without thinking of the Spoken Word by our beloved brother and friend, President Richard L. Evans.

STRENGTH IN PRAYER

As I look into this great audience, I feel very weak and very humble, and I pray that the Lord will help me. I have prayed to the Lord, not once, but many times the last few days, and I pray to the Lord first because I believe in prayer, and second, I pray to the Lord because I know of my weaknesses and I know of my incapacities, and I am very dependent upon the help of the Lord. I would feel sorry for anyone who would attempt to occupy this position if he felt in his own strength, that his own sufficiency, was enough. I will be very grateful to you if you will say a short prayer for me, because I need it very badly.

Sometimes I have wished that all of you could have this opportunity for just a moment, not because I think you would enjoy it any more than I do, but because it is indeed a humbling experience and certainly a sobering experience.

I have felt the prayers of this conference were very strengthening, indeed, every one of them. I have enjoyed the words of our brethren. I love them as men; I admire and respect them.

Prayer is indeed a privilege; it is indeed a blessing; and it is indeed a comfort. Prayer is not just a duty.

PAGEANT AT HILL CUMORAH

I had made some study and preparation to discuss a subject that I thought might be appropriate at this conference, but I am not going to give that talk. Instead, if you will pardon me, I would like to share with you an experience that I recently had at Hill Cumorah and the Sacred Grove at Palmyra, New York.

I am grateful for the privilege of being in Palmyra at the time the pageant was presented, entitled *America's Witness for Christ*. This pageant was presented by the missionaries, approximately one hundred and ninety of them, of the Eastern States Mission, under the direction of Dr. Harold I. Hansen of the Utah State Agricultural College faculty, and President George Q. Morris of the Eastern States Mission.

The pageant is the story of the Book of Mormon. The rustic setting of Hill Cumorah is the stage or the background of that pageant. The scenes are those of the Angel Moroni receiving his instructions from his father Mormon, the story of the Prophet Joseph receiving his instructions from the Angel Moroni, and other scenes of the Nephite and Lamanite people, the story of the Book of Mormon, and the great message of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

The pageant was held on three nights, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Thursday evening, the first night, the newspapers estimated that there were between twelve and fifteen thousand people who attended that pageant. The second night it was estimated there were between twenty and twenty-five thousand people who attended the pageant, and on the last night, the third evening, it was estimated that there were between twenty-five and thirty-five thousand people assembled to witness that great pageant.

NON-MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

We must keep in mind that probably ninety percent of that great gathering were non-members of the Church. To me it was great evidence that the prejudice and ill feeling, though not entirely diminished, was certainly at a low ebb. The newspapers of the cities in New York were very liberal, very courteous, and very praiseworthy of that great pageant.

The highway patrol of the state of New York estimated that there were thousands of carloads of people the last night who could not get to see the pageant because the parking lots and the highways were all congested. The police rendered us most excellent service.

The officials of those cities were very friendly. It was reported that one of the businessmen of Palmyra or Rochester stated that he thought the communities should assist by making contributions to the pageant, and they ought to make a collection and help finance that great pageant. Of course, our appreciation was expressed to them, and we told them this was not necessary; nevertheless it was the attitude that he expressed which we appreciated.

Hundreds of the homes there were opened to people. Many of our missionaries while they were there at Palmyra preparing for the pageant, stayed in the homes of people who were not members of the Church.

BLESSING SOUGHT

The pageant was scheduled for nine-thirty in the evening. The dates had been selected when the moon was not shining, because the

participants wanted darkness of the night on the hill. All the lights were turned off in that vicinity at the beginning of the pageant. At nine-ten every night those missionaries were asked to assemble at a certain wooded spot on Hill Cumorah, behind one of the large scenes, in the darkness. There was that great audience out in front, not knowing what was going on, but there those missionaries assembled every night at nine-ten, quietly, in a circle, huddled together, praying to the Lord that he would bless that pageant, that it would go forward without any interruption and that the audience would partake of the spirit of the pageant.

I remember the first night it started to rain about six o'clock. There was some concern whether or not it would prevent presentation of the pageant. It is all outdoors: the stage, the audience, and the scenes. I remember shaking hands with two fine young missionaries who had their pageant costumes on, and I said to them, as I shook hands with them, "I hope the rain will not spoil the pageant."

One of them looked me straight in the eye and he said: "Oh, Bishop, don't worry, the rain will not spoil the pageant. Nothing will spoil the pageant, because the elders of this mission have united our faith and called upon the Lord to bless this pageant that the message would go forward to the thousands of people who assemble to witness it."

Now some may call that simple faith, but I call that most beautiful, most humble faith. By the time the pageant was ready to start, the storm had ceased and the stars were out bright.

It was stated that no group of professionals in all the world could present that pageant as those humble missionaries presented it because their hearts and souls were in it and because they knew this story to be true. They were living that story; they were preaching that story; and for that reason great honor and credit is due those missionaries.

FAITH EVIDENCED

The audience was kept informed of the pageant proceedings by narrators who were speaking over a central loud-speaking system. Beautiful spotlights were flashed upon the different scenes on the Hill Cumorah. A commercial firm was employed to furnish the loud-speaking system, and a few of the Mormon missionaries who were mechanically inclined were assigned to help the technician with the loud-speaking system.

The last night the technician became very much concerned that the loud-speaking system might not continue to operate, and he told the missionaries he did not know what to do. There was that great audience of thousands of people. They could not follow the pageant without the loud-speaking system functioning, because some of the audience were a block away from the Hill and from the scenes. But as he became concerned, all he would have needed to do was to

•

ask those missionaries, but he did not do that, so they took it in their own hands. They went out behind that truck in the wooded section of Hill Cumorah, and as we would expect, those missionaries knelt down and prayed that the Lord would see to it that the loud-speaking system would continue, and the loud-speaking system did continue until the pageant was over.

That kind of faith is the kind of faith that we have been hearing about the last few days here. That is the kind of faith that draws men close to God, their Eternal Father. May I quote from Alma just a word about that same kind of faith:

Yea, there are many who do say: If thou wilt show unto us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe.

Now I ask, is that faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it. And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true. (Alma 32:17-18, 21.)

May I digress here, just a little, to say to those teachers or to any philosophers or to any men who have to do with young people, that you never say anything or do anything knowingly or unknowingly that would shock that beautiful faith in the lives of young people. Conviction kindles conviction; faith promotes faith; and testimony inspires testimony.

Faith is one of the great principles of the Church. Faith is that which brought our forefathers to this country. I am grateful for the faith of my grandfather in Denmark where he accepted the gospel because he had faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The pageant closed the third night, and before that great audience, as they saw the last scene, four missionaries, in the darkness of the night, with a brilliant spotlight flashed upon them, stood on top of Hill Cumorah. They were dressed in beautiful long white robes and each of them with his bugle turned toward that beautiful monument of the Angel Moroni and played in unity, "An Angel From On High." Those thirty thousand people could not have witnessed that scene without their hearts being touched; it was one of the most thrilling yet touching experiences of my life.

CONFERENCE IN SACRED GROVE

Never in my life have I appreciated, probably, as I did that very moment what that beautiful story has meant to us as a people. The next day following that great pageant those same missionaries held their missionary conference on a beautiful Sabbath morning in the Sacred Grove. They had held two sessions there Friday and Saturday. Since their pageant was produced at night, they had their days for their conferences.

Saturday afternoon was devoted entirely to testimony bearing. Sunday morning's meeting was programmed; speakers were called

upon to speak; but in the afternoon it was not programmed, and the meeting started at one o'clock in the afternoon, with the idea that it would perhaps close by four o'clock, and we would thus get an extra hour of testimony bearing.

I wish everyone could have been in that Sacred Grove that beautiful afternoon as those elders, without wasting a minute's time or a second's time, came forward and stood by the microphone. There was no pulpit to stand by, so they stood there by the loud-speaker and gave their testimonies, one by one. Those three hours passed all too quickly. Four o'clock came, and as the missionaries had expressed the desire to bear their testimony in the Sacred Grove, they were not all through, and it was decided to continue the meeting until five o'clock, but at five o'clock they were not through and it continued till six o'clock. At six o'clock they were not through, and we continued the meeting until seven o'clock—until every missionary there had had an opportunity to bear his or her testimony. I think eighty-nine of them that afternoon bore their testimonies.

PRIVILEGE OF A MISSION

You could not have doubted that testimony if you had heard those young men and women. Some of them had been in the mission field only a month, and, oh, how they thanked the Lord for the privilege of that mission. I thought what a shame it would have been if any one of those boys or girls had been denied that mission, and I thought of the thousands of others who probably will want to go on a mission some day, and sometimes they are made to feel as if they cannot afford it. I hope some of us in the Church who have been blessed perhaps more than others with financial security and material things, will share it with some missionary who wants to go on a mission, and never let it be said that a boy was kept home from a mission because someone could not afford it.

As those missionaries came forward, I wished their fathers and mothers could have heard the great love they expressed for them. They truly love and appreciate you. Every one of them, without an exception, was so grateful for his father and mother, and many of them were sons and daughters of widowed mothers. Oh, how the gratitude came from their souls for the love of their widowed mothers. Some of them had experienced the loss of their father or mother while they had been in the mission field, but there was no evidence of bitterness. Every one of them acknowledged the hand of the Lord, even in that sorrow that came to them while they were away.

But there were some who pleaded with the Lord to bless their parents and their loved ones while they were in the mission field. I am sure that if you parents and the brothers and the sisters and the loved ones could have heard those boys, you would have tried harder to live as they are teaching. How they thanked the Lord for the blessings that had come to them. I was astounded at the strength

of their testimonies. Two or three of them had only been out two or three weeks, and how they loved their companions, how they loved their mission president, and the same thing could be said of all of the five thousand missionaries who are in the field today.

I do not see how the homes, the families, and the loved ones of those missionaries could help but partake of that same sweet spirit when they so humbly prayed for them. Many of them spoke to the Lord so kindly, acknowledged their shortcomings, and prayed to the Lord that he would help them overcome those weaknesses. I am sure that the Lord was looking down upon those missionaries with all of his tender mercy.

GOD'S PAY

As the day closed and every missionary had borne his testimony, I could not help but think of this poem, and I would like to read it as a tribute to those missionaries and all missionaries. It is entitled, "Who Does God's Work Will Get God's Pay":

Who does God's work will get God's pay;
 No human hand God's hand can stay.
 He does not pay as others pay.
 But God's high wisdom knows a way;
 And this is sure, let come what may;
 Who does God's work will get God's pay.

At seven o'clock at night the sun went down—the shadows fell, and it seemed as if God in heaven had looked down and pronounced a silent benediction on the heads of all who were assembled in the Sacred Grove that day. Yes, it was as if those servants of the Lord had been able to lift up the corner of the veil and had a little glimpse into the eternities to come.

May God bless the missionaries all over the earth. May our homes and all of us partake of the spirit that they are privileged to enjoy, and I know and you know why they are privileged to enjoy that spirit. It is because they live so close to the Lord.

I know that the Spirit of the Lord was there in the grove that day. I know that sacred spot was the place to which the Prophet Joseph went as a boy and knelt down and prayed to the Lord, and there the Father and Son appeared to him. I know that those thousands who saw the story of the pageant could not help but receive some influence and inspiration for having witnessed it, and I am confident that they are hungering to hear more about it.

May the Lord bless us in our work that we may live as those missionaries preach. May the Lord bless us that we may have the Spirit of the Lord with us to guide us in our every act every day, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Tabernacle Choir and congregation sang the hymn, "For the Strength of the Hills."