

President David O. McKay:

Before Elder Sill speaks to us, the Choir and Congregation will join in singing two stanzas of "O Ye Mountains High."

The Brigham Young University Combined Choruses and the congregation

joined in singing the hymn, "O Ye Mountains High."

President David O. McKay:

Elder Sterling W. Sill, Assistant to the Council of the Twelve, will now address us. He will be followed by Elder Oscar A. Kirkham.

ELDER STERLING W. SILL

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve Apostles

LAST SUNDAY we celebrated the event which initiated upon this earth the universal bodily resurrection. Great events have a way of increasing in importance in our minds when we hold them up for study and contemplation and try to determine their significance, particularly as they apply to our own lives. To assist in this process, we have adopted the very helpful custom of setting aside special days to think about special things. In addition to Easter we have many other wonderful days.

We have set aside the thirteenth of next month as Mother's Day, and we hold the significance of this great occasion with all that it stands for, up before our minds, and as a result the quality of our lives tends to adjust upward to maintain the level of our thoughts.

Each Fourth of July we set aside a day to celebrate our nation's birthday, and we think about our freedom, and what it means, and what it has cost, and what would happen if it were lost, and what we might be able to do to further promote the great idea of freedom in our lives, and in the world about us.

On the twenty-fifth of December we set aside another day and hold up before our minds the life and teachings of Him who was ordained to be the Savior of the world and the Redeemer of men.

And we think about his example and his sacrifice and what they mean to us, what he had in mind when he said, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me." (See John 12:32.)

It has been said that the human mind has some of the qualities of the tendrils of a climbing vine; that is, it tends to attach itself and draw itself upward by what it is put in contact with. We set

aside these special days to put our minds in contact with the greatest ideas and ideals in the world. From this point of view, think what the effect has been in America over the years to both old and young, of looking up to the virtues and accomplishments of Washington and Lincoln, both of whom we believe to have been raised up by God, one to be the father of this divinely favored country and the other to save it from dissolution. The lives of both of these great men so rich in integrity, honor, and devotion to duty, are held up before our minds to draw us to a higher level of thinking.

This year happens to be the 250th anniversary of the birth of Benjamin Franklin, and during this year throughout America much is being written and spoken about the outstanding character qualities of this great American. And as our minds attach themselves, we tend to absorb these qualities to ennoble our own lives. Each of these special occasions serves a necessary and different purpose.

This morning I would like to put your minds in contact with the fact that this is the 150th anniversary year of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith whose life marks the beginning of the greatest and final gospel dispensation. The importance of this great event has an unusual and overwhelming significance in the life of every human being who lives upon the earth.

In holding this thought up for your consideration, I would like to take you back in history some 3700 years to the birth of another prophet by the name of Joseph. This Joseph was the son of Jacob and one of the twelve brothers who later became the leaders of the

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Twelve Tribes. Like Joseph Smith, this Joseph also received manifestations of the will of the Lord at a very early age. This apparent favor caused some jealousies among his brothers, and when Joseph was seventeen years old, he was sent by his father to inquire about the welfare of his brothers who were tending the family flocks at Dothan. When they saw him approaching, they said, "Behold the dreamer cometh," and they plotted to take his life. But by the intercession of one of his brothers, a compromise was reached, and they sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver, which is approximately eleven dollars in American money, to a group of Ishmaelites who were going down into Egypt to sell their spices.

In Egypt God did not forsake Joseph but continued to give him other manifestations of the divine will. This fact was known to some of Joseph's associates, and fifteen years later when Pharaoh had a dream which troubled him, Joseph was sent for. Joseph told Pharaoh that there would come seven years of great plenty. These would be followed by seven years of famine, and Joseph advised Pharaoh to build granaries and store up the corn in the good years to reduce the suffering during the years of famine. Pharaoh, seeing that Joseph was a man of ability and understanding and that the Lord was with him, appointed him to be the manager of this great Egyptian welfare program. Then Joseph built granaries and stored up the corn during these seven years of plenty.

Finally the years of abundance were over, and the great famine began. Then Joseph opened the granaries, and all of the surrounding nations, including the brothers of Joseph, came to Egypt to buy corn. When the brothers learned that Joseph was now a man of great authority and power, they were naturally very frightened. But Joseph quieted their fears with these words. He said,

... be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, . . . that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. (Gen. 45:5.)

And thus for approximately eleven dollars, several nations were saved from starvation.

It is a little bit difficult to understand "a famine" when one of our most pressing problems is surplus and oversupply. But it is even more difficult when men have pushed God out of their interests, to understand another kind of famine which he foretold should come upon the earth in consequence of disobedience and sin. In foretelling this famine, the Prophet Amos said,

Behold the days come, sayeth the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine for bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord:

And they [men] shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, and shall run to and fro to seek after the word of the Lord, and shall not find it. (Amos 8:11-12.)

This famine was also literally fulfilled as foretold. Isaiah had said,

The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances, broken the everlasting covenant. (Isaiah 24:5.)

The ministry of the Master himself was permitted to continue for only three short years. Then one by one each of the apostles was put to death. According to tradition Peter, Andrew, Simon, and Philip were crucified; James and Paul were beheaded; Bartholomew was flayed alive; Matthew was slain with a battle-ax; Thomas was run through with a lance; James was beaten to death; Thaddeus was shot through with arrows; Barnabas was stoned; Mark was dragged to death in the streets of Alexandria; and John, the one surviving apostle, was banished to that rocky little island in the Aegean Sea called Patmos.

The Church, thus left without divine leadership, soon sank to the lower level of a strictly human institution, and as conditions went from bad to worse, that prophecy of Isaiah saw complete fulfillment which said, "For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people." (Isaiah 60:2.)

But as has been said, God always provides the remedy before the plague. Six hundred years B.C. a little group of Israelites who were descendants of Joseph were led away from Jerusalem by the Lord, headed for a far-off land which

we now know as America. They brought with them their records and the writings of their prophets, including the writings of this same Prophet Joseph who was sent into Egypt "to preserve life." After their arrival in the promised land, Lehi read to them a prophecy made by their famous ancestor, Joseph, about events that should take place in the latter days in this new land.

He said,

Yea, Joseph truly said: Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins. And unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers. . . .

And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father. And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation. (2 Nephi 3:7, 15.)

Joseph Smith fulfilled these prophecies. Joseph had said, "His name shall be called after me," Joseph. "And it shall be after the name of his father." Joseph Smith's father's name was Joseph. Then the prophet said, "And he shall be like unto me." Joseph, the son of Jacob, was sent before the face of the Egyptian famine to preserve life. And Joseph Smith was sent before the face of the spiritual famine spoken of by Amos, for exactly the same purpose, to unlock the granaries of spiritual truth, to dispel the darkness that covered the earth, and make possible that every living soul might have "life everlasting."

One of the most thrilling events that has ever happened in the world came as a part of the fulfillment of this prophecy, when in the early spring of 1820, God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, reappeared upon this earth to open this greatest and final gospel dispensation. And God has placed in the hands of men three great volumes of new scripture, outlining in every detail the simple principles of the gospel, that all men might be fed the bread of life and be enabled thereby to work out their individual personal exaltation.

But it is possible to perish even in the

presence of plenty. In the early gold rush days of this country many men lost their lives trying to cross what was known as the great American desert. Later when their bodies were recovered, it was found that many of them had died in close proximity to the water holes. With just a little additional knowledge, they would have been able to have saved their own lives.

This experience of the forty-niners has its spiritual counterpart in our own day. Emerson indicated this possibility when he said,

On the brink of the waters of life and truth we are miserably dying. Sometimes we are furthest away when we are closest by. We stand on the brink of an ocean of power, but each must take the step that would bring him there.

It is always a pathetic tragedy when that step is not taken.

This is evidenced by the fact that nineteen hundred years ago unheeding men lived in the very presence of the Son of God, and in response to his invitation to partake of the truths of eternal life they merely said, "His blood be upon us, and on our children." (Matt. 27:25.) And so it has been. They were so near—yet they were so far away. How this event should challenge our initiative and put us on our feet, earnestly seeking that greatest of all blessings, eternal exaltation!

But nineteen hundred years have come and gone since that time, and the lives of men are still being wasted by the devastation of spiritual famine. Certainly it is just as true now as it was then, that "there is only one name given whereby man must be saved." (See Acts 4:12.) Yet out of over two billion people who presently occupy the earth, only one-third even bear the name of Christian. And this one-third is divided into some 250 contending sects, all claiming to accept the Bible as the inspired word of God and the only authoritative rule of faith and doctrine. Their confusion on even the most simple points of doctrine is indicated by the report that some seventy-eight of these baptize by immersion, many sprinkle, sixty-eight have optional forms, sixty-seven practise infant baptism, many have no baptism. Thirty-nine require

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no adherent to creed or doctrine of any kind.

Almost every Protestant church came into existence because of "a protest" or an "argument." The division of opinion caused by the Civil War was responsible for the formation of many new churches. The Church of England was organized because the Pope refused to give Henry VIII a divorce. There are many "state churches." It was Emperor Constantine, not the servants of the Lord, that made Christianity the church of the Roman Empire.

And as this famine has run its long, destructive course, many of the truths that Jesus came to give to the world have been lost, even to "know God" which Jesus declared was "life eternal."

One of the most popular of present day ministers recently said, "No one can possibly know about God. God is absolutely immeasurable, undiscoverable and undiscernible." He said, "He has no body or shape." St. Augustine attempted to describe the nature of God as a circle whose center was everywhere and circumference nowhere.

In the severity of this famine of spiritual understanding, men have denied personality to deity. They have also deprived him of his body. They have left him without senses, faculties or feelings. And as a natural consequence, the world in large part is still where Paul found it nineteen hundred years ago, worshipping at the feet of an "unknown God," and this without proper understanding of even the most simple principles taught by Jesus and recorded in the Bible. These include such important doctrines as the literal bodily resurrection, the degrees of glory, the pre-existence of man, salvation for the dead, the functions of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods, the proper organization of the Church, what the name of the Church should be, the function of sacred temples, the eternity of the family unit, and many other important doctrines vital to our salvation and all plainly taught by Jesus and recorded in the Bible.

So far as I know, the most important fact there is in the world today is that God has again restored the priesthood, and his voice has regiven that divine

commission saying, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, . . ." (Matt. 28:19.) Amos said that many should "run to and fro seeking the word of the Lord but should not find it." One of the reasons that some can't find it is that as of old, some have eyes that see not. There are some others who can't find it because some of us who have access to it, keep our lights hidden under a bushel. There are others who can't find it because of their confusion when our lives don't accord with our teachings.

The restoration of the gospel has a vital significance in the life of every person upon the earth. This cannot be evaded nor avoided. This responsibility we must understand. In one of the most meaningful of all latter day scriptures, the Lord has said, "It must needs be that all men must be left without excuse," (see D & C 88:82) and that applies to those who fail to hear, and even more particularly to those who fail to teach, for those who bear the divine commission to dispense spiritual truth must also share in the prospective condemnation spoken of by Paul who said, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel."

And so during this anniversary year, we hold up before our minds and the minds of all men the tremendous message of the restoration, and pray that our minds may attach themselves to the revealed word of the Lord with such great power, diligence, and faith, that this devastating famine may be dispelled, that all men may be able to find the clear waters of eternal life, and that because of our obedience to the gospel, that God may thereby be enabled to draw all of his children upward to him to inherit the celestial kingdom.

May God bless us I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President David O. McKay:

You have just listened to Elder Sterling W. Sill, Assistant to the Council of the Twelve. We shall now hear Elder Oscar A. Kirkham of the First Council of Seventy.