

Friday, April 5

First Day

President Kimball

For the benefit of the television and radio audience who have just joined us, we again announce that we are gathered in the historic Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah

in the first session of the 144th Annual Conference of the Church.

Elder John H. Vandenberg, Assistant to the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will now address us.

Following Elder Vandenberg, we will hear from Elder Paul H. Dunn of the First Council of Seventy.

Elder John H. Vandenberg

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

Visiting with some of the members of the Church at the Munich conference last summer, a young lady, a recent convert, queried: "Since we are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, why do we refer to ourselves as Mormons?"

Joseph Fielding Smith, in responding to a similar question, said: "The Nephites believed in Christ; they wrote and prophesied of him and his mission, and while there is no opprobrium that can justly be attached to one who believes in the Book of Mormon, there is no valid reason why Latter-day Saints should speak of themselves as 'Mormons' or of the Church as the 'Mormon Church.' . . . The mission of [the Church is] persuading people to believe in Christ, the Son of God, and of becoming members of His Church—the [true] church of Jesus Christ [of Latter-day Saints]." (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, Deseret Book Co., 1971, vol. 4, pp. 174-75.)

The name "Mormon"

A flashback in my mind recalled to my memory an incident when two business acquaintances entered my office and greeted me with, "You're a Mormon; tell us, where does the word *Mormon* come from and what is its meaning?" My response was, "The

word *Mormon* was the name of an ancient prophet of God. He lived on the American continent a few hundred years after the advent of Christ. He had at his disposal a continuous religious and historical record of the people who had migrated to, and lived for hundreds of years on, the American continents. Mormon made an abridgment of these records, which contained the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The record was engraved on gold plates and deposited in a hill known as Cumorah, located in what we now know to be the state of New York. In this latter day, under divine direction, Joseph Smith obtained the plates and translated them by the power of God. This abridgment was titled the Book of Mormon. The meaning of the word, as given by Joseph Smith, is 'more good.'" (See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 300.) The gentlemen seemed interested, thanked me, and departed without further comment.

In retrospect I have recalled this experience and pondered over the words *more good*, which undoubtedly mean "an extension of the good." Joseph Smith, in commenting on the subject, referred to the Bible as being "good." As to the Book of Mormon, he stated: "It may be well to observe here, that the Lord greatly encouraged and strengthened the faith of his little flock, which had embraced the fulness of the

everlasting Gospel, as revealed to them in the Book of Mormon, by giving some more extended information upon the scriptures. . . ." (*Documentary History of the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 131-32.)

True doctrine lost

Religious history confirms through the Bible that the very basic truths—(1) the nature of the Godhead and (2) revelation through the prophets—which are essential to the salvation of mankind, were available to the religious leaders through the centuries before and after the advent of the Savior. Yet because of transgressions there was a turning away from these truths, and there was a fulfillment of the prediction of the apostle Paul, who said: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

"That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that day of Christ is at hand.

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." (2 Thess. 2:1-3.)

President Joseph Fielding Smith summed up well what had happened as he said: "It should be remembered that the entire Christian world in 1820 had lost the true doctrine concerning God. The simple truth which was understood so clearly by the apostles and saints of old had been lost in the mysteries of an apostate world. All the ancient prophets, and the apostles of Jesus Christ had a clear understanding that the Father and the Son were separate personages, as our scriptures so clearly teach. Through apostasy this knowledge was lost, and in the year 325 A.D., a strange doctrine was introduced and soon spread throughout the Christian world. This doctrine confounded the persons of the Godhead, and distorted the true doctrine of God." (Joseph Fielding

Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, vol. 3, p. 117.)

There is no question that Jesus taught the very nature of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost—three personages of form and substance, individual and distinct. He taught that the true knowledge of the Godhead was essential to eternal life. He included in a prayer to his Father in heaven: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3.) Other references in the scriptures substantiate the individuality of the Holy Ghost. (See Matt. 3:15.)

Yet in the light of this truth there was a "strange doctrine" introduced of man-made creeds. Says one: "There is but one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the supreme, incorporeal, uncreated being, who exists of himself and is infinite in all his attributes. . . ." Says another: "There is one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness." Yet another says: "God is as he reveals himself. He is creative reality . . . He is expressive act . . . He is responsive power . . . He is one God experienced in a trinitarian fashion." (Alvin R. Dyer, *The Meaning of Truth*, Deseret Book Co., 1961, p. 50.)

Nature of Godhead

These are but a few examples of the extent of the departure from the true teachings of the scriptures. Now the Book of Mormon gives us an extension and reaffirmation of the true corporeal nature of a member of the Godhead. Jesus speaks to the brother of Jared, saying: ". . . therefore I show myself unto you. . . .

"... Behold, I am Jesus Christ . . .

"And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? . . .

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"Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; . . . and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh." (Eth. 3:13-16.)

Two thousand years later, this same Jesus came to earth in the same form and said: ". . . he that hath seen me hath seen the Father. . . ." (John 14:9.)

This corporeal individuality was substantiated by the Prophet Joseph Smith, who had the revealing experience of seeing the Father and the Son in corporeal form and conversing with them. He specifically states: "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. . . ." (D&C 130:22.)

Founded upon revelation

Another basic scriptural truth is that Jesus taught that his church was founded upon the rock of revelation (see Matt. 16:16-18), in harmony with the words of the prophet Amos, who declared: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7.)

There seems to be astonishment among mankind generally that God would speak again in this latter day. "The heavens are closed," they declare. It was a dark day when the religious leaders declared that revelation had ceased and when they presumed that mankind could negotiate his way by his own wisdom, leaning on the arm of flesh. But "'The world by wisdom know not God,' so the world by speculation are destitute of revelation. . . ." (DHC, vol. 5, p. 400.) It was a glorious day when the doctrine of revelation was again restored to mankind in this latter day.

Again the Book of Mormon gives us this expansion of this doctrine:

"Behold, great and marvelous are the works of the Lord. How unsearch-

able are the depths of the mysteries of him; and it is impossible that man should find out all his ways. And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God.

"Wherefore, brethren, seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works." (Jác. 4:8, 10.)

Purpose of Gospel

The whole purpose of the gospel is to teach men that the most important thing in life is life itself and that man may pursue happiness. ". . . Men are, that they might have joy" (2 Ne. 2:25) is the decree of the Lord. The purpose of the Book of Mormon is to convince both Jew and gentile that Jesus is the Christ, for only through him can salvation, eternal life, and eternal joy be obtained.

There is great comfort in the knowledge of truth, for truth has the quality of certainty and authority. It has been said that "'no pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of truth' (a hill not to be commanded, and where the air is always clear and serene), 'and to see the errors, and wanderings, and mists, and tempests, in the vale below': so always that this prospect be with pity, and not with swelling pride. Certainly, it is heaven upon earth, to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in providence, and turn upon the poles of truth." (Francis Bacon, "On Truth.")

Tested by truth

The Prophet Joseph Smith stood upon that vantage ground and spoke with authority. He said: ". . . The boldness of my plans and measures can readily be tested by the touchstone of . . . truth, for truth is a matter of

fact; and the fact is, that by the power of God I translated the Book of Mormon from hieroglyphics, the knowledge of which was lost to the world; in which wonderful event I stood alone, an unlearned youth, to combat the worldly wisdom and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries with a new revelation, which (if they would receive the everlasting Gospel) would open the eyes of more than eight hundred millions of people, and make 'plain the old paths,' wherein 'if a man walk in all the ordinances of God blameless' he shall inherit eternal life. . . ." (George Q. Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, Deseret Book Co., 1964, p. 460.)

And further he said: "I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book." (*DHC*, vol. 4, p. 461.)

Promise to every man

The promise is to every man that he may know the truth if he will accept the challenge to test it by the "touchstone of truth."

So were the words of Jesus: "... 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.)

So were the words of Mormon: "... I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in

Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost." (Moro. 10:4.)

Many souls who have directed their inquiries in this manner can attest to the truth.

The Book of Mormon

With certainty the Book of Mormon is a pure and holy record, having been recorded by prophets under the guidance of our Heavenly Father, having been hid up for hundreds of years unto the Lord, having been revealed and translated by the power of God in the latter day. It is an undeveloped record, undisturbed by the wisdom of man, uncorrupted by the designs of men—a light on a hill to beckon all to come unto Christ.

Yes, we talk of Mormon; we respect him as a man of God. We accept his recorded doctrine as divine. He stands among the great men of God. His great book written under divine command stands without blemish. It is truth. Its teachings give strength and gladness to the heart. Yet it is not likely that Mormon would desire the true church to be called after him, for he testified of Jesus Christ and his mission.

May we ponder the privilege of being members of the Church of Jesus Christ and live according to its precepts, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Spencer W. Kimball

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