

that need to be learned and lived in order to achieve this ultimate goal of all eternity.

### Universal acceptance

Most impressive is the universal acceptance of gospel truths in the hearts of honest people. The Savior excluded no one from his circle of influence. So it is in his church today. I know a banker in Boston who will hurry home next Monday for family home evening (he does this every Monday); just exactly like another good brother I know of who owns a small farm in the mountains of Peru. I know a young father who lives on the island of Vava'u in Tonga who goes out faithfully making his home teaching calls in his outrigger canoe; but his faith is no different from that of the young business executive I know in London who loves the work and does his home teaching faithfully—both willing to DO IT.

### Follow the Master

That old Maori great-grandfather had every right to question the true values of so-called civilization that had been thrust upon him. Our jet age of atomic power and automatic everything can be helpful if used properly.

If sophisticated methods and automatic equipment can provide us with

more time to teach mankind eternal principles of God, then we are blessed most abundantly. If it only enables us to "lengthen our stride" in some devious direction, the adversary has won another round.

May we be blessed with the ability to touch hearts and lift up as we follow the life of the Master and the example of his living prophet on earth today as we just simply DO IT is my prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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The Tabernacle Choir sang, "Fight the Good Fight" unannounced following Elder Robert L. Simpson.

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### President Spencer W. Kimball

We have just listened to Elder Robert L. Simpson, Assistant to the Council of the Twelve. He was followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing, "Fight the Good Fight."

We welcome those who have just joined us on television and radio. We are convened in this, the first session of the 145th Semi-Annual Conference of the Church.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church will be our concluding speaker.

## Elder Bruce R. McConkie

Of the Council of the Twelve

Once or twice in a thousand years—perhaps a dozen times since mortal man became of dust a living soul—an event of such transcendent import occurs that neither heaven nor earth are ever thereafter the same.

### Great events

Once or twice in a score of genera-

tions the hand from heaven clasps the hand on earth in perfect fellowship, the divine drama unfolds, and the whole course of mortal events changes.

Now and then in a quiet garden, or amid the fires and thunders of Sinai, or inside a sepulchre that cannot be sealed, or in an upper room—almost always apart from the gaze of men and seldom known by more than a handful of

people—the Lord intervenes in the affairs of men and manifests his will relative to their salvation.

On such event took place six millennia ago in a garden which was planted eastward in Eden when the man Adam and the woman Eve fell that men might be. Another such event altered the course of history when an aged prophet believed God and built an ark wherein he and seven others, out of all the inhabitants of the earth, were saved from a watery grave.

### The Atonement

The most transcendent of all such event occurred in a garden called Gethsemane, outside Jerusalem's walls, when the Chief Citizen of planet earth sweat great drops of blood from every pore as he in agony took upon himself the sins of all men on conditions of repentance. Yet another of these events, destined to affect the life and being of every living soul, happened in the Arimathean's tomb when the sinless spirit of the one perfect man returned from the paradise of God to inhabit again—this time in glorious immortality—the pierced and slain body that once was his.

### The First Vision

But the occurrence of which we desire more particularly to speak, and which ranks in importance alongside the greatest verities of revealed religion, is one that took place in a grove of trees near Palmyra, New York, on a beautiful, clear day early in the spring of 1820. Was it on the sixth of April? Perhaps—such at least is the tradition. But be that as it may, what transpired at that time was destined to affect the salvation of the billions of our Father's children who should live on earth from that day to the great winding up scene when the Son shall deliver up the kingdom, spotless, to his Father.

By comparison to what then occurred, the command of the man

Moriancumer unto the mountain Zerin, "Remove," and it was removed; or the decree of the man Moses to the Red Sea, "Divide," and the waters were divided, congealing on the right hand and on the left; or the command of the man Joshua, "Sun, stand thou still, and thou moon likewise," and it was so—by comparison to what happened in that grove of trees in western New York on that spring morning, such things as these fade into an obscure insignificance.

As we approach with awe and reverence, in the spirit of worship and thanksgiving, the heaven-sent miracle of that bright morn, let us view first the setting in which the heavens would be rent and the miracle wrought.

### Conditions in 1820

That year of grace, 1820, like the 1,400 years which preceded it, was one in which darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the minds of the people. It was a day of spiritual darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains. Angels no longer ministered to their fellow beings; the voice of God was stilled, and man no longer saw the face of his Maker; gifts, signs, miracles, and all the special endowments enjoyed by the saints of old were no longer the common inheritance of those in whose hearts religious zeal was planted. There were no visions, no revelations, no rending of the heavens; the Lord was not raining down righteousness upon a chosen people as he had done in days of old.

The dead were not raised, nor the eyes of the blind opened, nor the ears of the deaf unstopped. There were no legal administrators whose acts were binding on earth and in heaven. That gospel preached by Paul, and for which Peter died, was no longer proclaimed from the pulpits of Christendom.

In short, apostasy reigned supreme; it was universal, complete, all pervading. The religion of the lowly Nazarene

was nowhere to be found. All sects, parties, and denominations had gone astray. Satan rejoiced and his angels laughed. Such were the social and religious conditions of the day.

### Joseph Smith, Jr. appointed

But in the wisdom of Him who knoweth all things, who rules supreme o'er earth and hell, the hour had come for the promised restoration. Eighteen twenty was to be the year when the Great Jehovah would commence the restitution of all things spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began. The covenants made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob concerning their seed were about to be fulfilled.

When the season comes to plant and harvest, the Lord of the vineyard sends the needed husbandmen. The Lord's work among men is done by men; choice and selected souls become his servants. And so at the time appointed came Joseph Smith, Jr., the man appointed. This spiritual giant of whom it is now said, "Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it" (D&C 135:3)—this foreordained prophet came to usher in the Lord's great latter-day work.

When the Lord needed an Enoch to build Zion, a city of holiness, Enoch was there. When he needed a Moses to stand as the great lawgiver in Israel, Moses was there. When the time arrived for the promised Messiah to give his life a ransom for many, the Great Deliverer was there. And thanks be to God, when the hour arrived to usher in the dispensation of the fulness of times, there was Joseph Smith, the mighty prophet of latter-days.

To him the Lord said, "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." (D&C 122:1-2.)

### Christianity confused

It was 1820; the man and the hour joined hands. The vision was soon to be, and the burning flames of gospel truth would then consume the briars and weeds of sectarianism that encumbered the Lord's vineyard.

To prepare for the day of burning which was to be, a spirit of religious concern and unrest swept the frontier areas where the Lord's future prophet dwelt in peaceful obscurity. The ministers of a decadent Christendom plied their trade with fanatical valor. Their cries went forth, "'Lo, here is Christ,' and, 'Lo, there.'" (Joseph Smith 2:5.)

Each professor of religion used all his powers of reason and sophistry to gain converts to his particular system of salvation. Feelings were intense; bitterness welled up in many hearts. A "war of words and tumult of opinions" spread rancor and division among the people. (Joseph Smith 2:10.) In the midst of these contentious times, God's future prophet often said to himself: "What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right, or are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?" (Joseph Smith 2:10.)

### Ray of living light

It was at this critical point that divine providence caused a ray of living light to shine forth from God's holy word and enlighten the heart of the troubled truthseeker.

Search the scriptures. Treasure up gospel truths. Enjoy the words of eternal life in this life, and hope for immortal glory in the life to come. Read, ponder, and pray about all that the prophets have written. Such is the course which the Lord invites men to pursue where his holy word is concerned. And it was into this path of

progress and enlightenment that young Joseph was led by that providential hand which knows the end from the beginning and rules in love and mercy over all his children.

### Important scripture

The boy Joseph—then in his fifteenth year and who but twenty-four years hence would die a martyr's death for what he was about to see and for the witness which he bore of it—read in the book of James a verse of scripture destined to be the most influential single verse of holy writ ever to flow from a prophetic pen.

Moses gave us this great proclamation, which is believed by many to be the crowning Old Testament scripture: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:

"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." (Deut. 6:4-5.) And Jesus our Lord picking up the words of love and service here spoken, called them the first and great commandment.

The words which most people believe to be the greatest scriptural utterance of New Testament times are, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16.)

It is difficult to overstate the importance and influence on the lives of men of these and kindred passages. And yet the words of James which opened the door to the First Vision, and which record the way in which all men can come to know what God hath wrought in these last days, these few words contain the most influential expression ever to fall from prophetic lips. They ushered in the greatest of all the works of God, the work that is to cover the earth with converts in due course.

These are the words: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and up-

braideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5.)

### Ask in faith

Simple, easy, pure words—words which set the stage for all men in all ages to learn the mind and will of Him who made them; words dictated by the Holy Ghost to one of the last New Testament prophets; words which would sink into the heart of the first prophet of latter days and be the means of ushering in the greatest of all gospel dispensations!

Dost thou, O man, lack wisdom? Wouldst thou know which of all the churches is right and which thou shouldst join? Is there a need in thy life for more knowledge than thou now hast? Wouldst thou break the barriers of time and space and view the visions of eternity?

Then ask of God; seek his face; rely upon thy Maker; turn to him who is the source of truth and the fountain of all righteousness!

But there is a condition attached, a proviso that must accompany thy pleas. James says, "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

"For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." (James 1:6-7.)

### Great impact

And so at this turning point in history—while the Spirit of God was brooding over the darkness of the world and the spirits of men yet unborn were awaiting the decree, "Let there be light"—young Joseph was guided of God to ponder those words which would usher in the greatest era of light and truth ever to exist on earth.

"Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man," the young prophet would say later, "than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into

every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again." (Joseph Smith 2:12.)

Such are the ways of God and such are the workings of his Holy Spirit. With a power that none can know save those whose souls are tuned to the infinite, the words of James sank into the heart of the great prophet of latter-days.

### "Ask of God"

Of the religious controversy which was pouring venom and confusion throughout the whole area, Joseph Smith said, "The teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question [of which church was right] by an appeal to the Bible." (Joseph Smith 2:12.)

He must ask of God, as all men must, and ask he did. He walked a short distance from his country home to a secluded place in a grove of trees. There, alone, he knelt and prayed, pouring out his soul to his Maker, offering up the desires of his heart to God.

This was the hour of destiny and hope. Amid the gloom of apostate darkness a light would shine forth. Creation's decree, the great proclamation—"Let there be light"—was to be issued anew. The light of the gospel, the light of the Everlasting Word, would soon shed its rays o'er all the earth.

### Opposition in all things

But great things do not come easily; events that shake the earth run into mountains of resistance. There is an opposition in all things; every person who seeks to find the true church runs counter to the ways of the world. Joseph Smith was no exception.

As he prayed, the powers of evil fought back with satanic terror. "I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me," he said, "and had such an astonishing influence over

me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction." (Joseph Smith 2:15.)

Such are the ways of Satan that when the God of heaven seeks to send the greatest light of the ages into the world, the forces of evil oppose it with the deepest darkness and iniquity of their benighted realm. Lucifer, our common enemy, fought the promised restoration as he now fights the accomplished restoration.

### Heavens are opened

"But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me," the Prophet continues, "and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head." (Joseph Smith 2:16.)

Thereupon the heavens parted and the veil was rent; the heavens, long brass, poured out showers of blessings; the age of light and truth and revelation and miracles and salvation was born.

The place, the hour, the need, the man, and the divine destiny all united to usher in God's great latter-day work. The heavens did not shake, nor the earth tremble. It was not an event heralded by the thunders and clouds on Sinai but one patterned after the calm serenity and peace present before an open tomb when Mary of Magdala uttered the reverent cry, "Rabboni," to the risen Lord.

### The greatest vision

This was the occasion when the greatest vision ever vouchsafed to man of which we have record burst the

gloom of solemn darkness. The gods of old revealed themselves anew.

"I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me," the Prophet said. (Joseph Smith 2:16.)

"It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*" (Joseph Smith 2:17.)

### Voice of God

Great God in heaven above—what wonders do we now behold! The heavens rend; the veil parts; the Creators of the universe come down; the Father and the Son both speak to mortal man. The voice of God is heard again; he is not dead; he lives and speaks; his words we hear as they were heard in olden days.

"My object in going to inquire of the Lord," our young supplicant says, "was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right—and which I should join.

"I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: 'they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.'" (Joseph Smith 2:18-19.)

### Rare moments

Once or twice in a thousand years a new door is opened through which all men must enter if they are to gain peace in this life and be inheritors of eternal life in the realms ahead.

Once or twice in a score of generations a new era dawns: the light from the east begins to drive the darkness of the earth from the hearts of men.

Now and then in a peaceful grove, apart from the gaze of men, heaven and earth share a moment of intimacy, and neither are ever thereafter the same. Such a moment occurred on that beautiful, clear morning in the spring of 1820 in a grove of trees near Palmyra, New York.

Man asked and God answered.

Joseph Smith saw the Father and the Son.

These things I know and of them I testify. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son, and whose witnesses we are. Amen.

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After Elder Bruce R. McConkie concluded his talk, the Tabernacle Choir sang without announcement the hymn, "Eternal Life."

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### President Spencer W. Kimball

Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Council of the Twelve has just given the concluding address, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "Eternal Life."

We are grateful to the managers and operators of the many television and radio stations for offering their facilities as a public service to bring the proceedings of this conference to a wide audience throughout many areas of the world.

These proceedings are being broadcast over stations in many foreign countries by means of satellite transmission. Through special arrangements