

abound in love, children and parents would have respect for one another. . . . [How else will our children come to] value honesty and integrity?" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1977, p. 20; or *Ensign*, May 1977, p. 16).

A successful life, the good life, the righteous Christian life requires something more than a contribution, though every contribution is valuable. Ultimately it requires commitment—whole souled, deeply held, eternally cherished commitment to the principles we know to be true in the commandments God has given. We need such loyalty to the Church, but that must immediately be interpreted as a loyalty in our personal habits and behavior, integrity in the wider community and marketplace, and—for the future's sake—devotion and character in our marriages and homes and families.

If we will be true and faithful to our principles, committed to a life of honesty and integrity, then no king or contest or fiery furnace will be able to compromise us. For the success of the kingdom of God on earth, may we stand as witnesses for him "at all times and in all things,

and in all places that [we] may be in, even until death" (Mosiah 18:9).

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Precious Savior, Dear Redeemer" without announcement.

President Hinckley

We have just heard from President Howard W. Hunter, President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, in whose recovery we have witnessed a remarkable and wonderful miracle. The Tabernacle Choir then sang "Precious Savior, Dear Redeemer."

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "Redeemer of Israel," following which we shall hear from Elder Carlos E. Asay, a member of the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation sang "Redeemer of Israel."

Elder Carlos E. Asay

A giant leap for mankind

I pray for the influence of the Holy Spirit as I discuss with you a most sacred subject—a subject that I hope will have special significance to those of you who may be investigating the Church. On July 20, 1969, astronauts landed on the moon, a planet located some 239,000 miles from the earth. Millions of people the world over witnessed this historic event on television and stared in amazement as the lunar module came to rest on the moon's surface. All were thrilled when Neil Armstrong exited the spacecraft and announced: "One small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind."

The press coverage of this monumental achievement was broad. It occupied headlines and was the subject of feature stories for many days. After all, the moon landing had opened new fron-

tiers of space travel, revealed new knowledge about the universe, and represented a major investment of human resources. Some reporters declared that the moon landing was the greatest event in the history of mankind since the resurrection of Christ.

I do stand in awe of the recent developments in space technology. My mind does not comprehend even a fraction of the miracles wrought by knowledgeable men of the world who have probed the universe. However, I take issue with those who believe that the placement of men upon the moon is the greatest occurrence of the last two thousand years. I do so because I know of an event wherein the Creator of the universe himself came to earth in answer to an obscure boy's humble prayer and revealed pure theology.

What constitutes greatness

Greatness is measured by men in many ways. It is generally equated with size, cost, quantity, and position. God, however, has a better way: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are [His] ways higher than [man's] ways" (Isaiah 55:9). In God's eyes, greatness is equated with light, truth, goodness, and service (see D&C 93:36; Matthew 23:11).

We are taught that eternal life is "the *greatest* of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14:7; italics added), and that eternal life is to know "the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom [he has] sent" (John 17:3). Therefore, it is concluded that anyone who would introduce the only true God to mankind and unwrap the gift of eternal life, making it available to all, would be a partaker of greatness and be associated with great events.

The simplicity of Joseph Smith

The obscure young man of whom I speak, who introduced the true and living God to a benighted world, was not sponsored by an organization or trained by a group of professionals. At the time, he was no prophet, nor was he a prophet's son. But like many who have been called in times past to perform a holy work, he was a common farm boy (see Amos 7:14–16).

He was the product of a God-fearing family—a family that thirsted after righteousness and exercised a simple but deep faith in the Lord. His school was the home, his teachers were loving parents, and his textbook was the Holy Bible. Yet, at the tender age of fourteen, he demonstrated a type of faith which had power to thrust him into the presence of Deity (see Mark 9:23).

There were no cameras trained upon him when he stepped into that grove of trees in upper New York state. There were no cheering throngs or support personnel to provide him encouragement. Nor were there newspaper reporters on hand to describe his actions. He knelt

alone under the gaze of his Heavenly Father and offered up the sincere desires of his heart with perfect confidence that his voice would be heard. He was unaware of the muted applause of unseen multitudes who had waited so patiently for the dawning of a new day and the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

His investment in working the miracle was not money, machines, manpower, or even the trappings of science; his was an investment of living faith and an indomitable will.

Joseph Smith's prayer and first vision in 1820 were no small things, even though they began as "one small step for a [young] man." Over the years they have proven to be "one giant leap for mankind"; for that act of supreme faith ended a long night of spiritual darkness, opened up a flood of unadulterated truths, and ushered in the dispensation of the fulness of times.

The truths of the First Vision

We are told that the spin-off effects of the moon mission were many. Such benefits are reflected in all the materials about us. However, the consequences of Joseph Smith's first vocal prayer and his probe into the unknown are infinitely greater and should be pondered seriously by all who are interested in "things as they *really* are, and of things as they *really* will be" (Jacob 4:13; italics added).

Joseph did not emerge from the grove with lunar rocks in his pocket or with moon dust on his shoes. He emerged with a changed countenance and with a gold mine of truth lodged in his mind and heart:

1. Joseph learned that there are no winners in wars of words or tumults of opinion regarding religious matters (see Joseph Smith—History 1:12). Such contention plays into the hands of Satan because he is the "father of contention" (3 Nephi 11:29).

Moreover, Joseph verified the fact that critical issues pertaining to the Spirit cannot be settled alone by "an appeal to the Bible" so long as teachers of religion

understand the same passage of scripture so differently (see Joseph Smith—History 1:12).

2. Joseph learned of “the power of some actual being from the unseen world” which bound his tongue and enveloped him in thick darkness as he began to pray (see 1:16). This power was exerted by the evil one, who viewed Joseph Smith as a threat to his realm of sin and error.

Few men have disturbed and annoyed the adversary more than Joseph; few have felt the combined powers of darkness more than he; and few have triumphed over Satan more nobly (see 1:20).

3. Joseph learned what Moses had learned years before about Satan’s darkness and nothingness, as compared with the light and liberty associated with God (see Moses 1:10–15). Said Joseph:

“I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

“It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound” (Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17).

“Light and truth [do] forsake [the] evil one” (D&C 93:37). The powers of darkness do flee before the powers of light, just as the night runs from the dawn.

4. Joseph learned that he was made in the image of God, exactly as the scriptures attest. In his own words:

“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—History 1:17).

In a matter of only a few moments, the damning myth of an impersonal, uncaring, and incomprehensible God was dispelled. The true nature of a Father in Heaven—the father of our spirits—was revealed in company with his Beloved

Son, even Jesus Christ, he who had atoned for the sins of man (see Hebrews 12:9).

As stated by an Apostle: “One minute’s instruction from personages clothed with the glory of God coming down from the eternal worlds is worth more than all the volumes that ever were written by uninspired men” (Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 12:354).

5. Joseph learned that none of the churches of the day was right and that he should not join any of them. He recounts:

“My object in going to inquire of the Lord 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” (Joseph Smith—History 1:18–19).

This pronouncement may have troubled Joseph at first because members of his family had affiliated with a specific faith and he, himself, had leanings toward another. But God had spoken, and who was he to dispute?

6. Joseph learned why he must not align himself with an existing church. His words are:

“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’” (1:19).

Having seen what he had seen and having heard what he had heard, how could he possibly join a sect unacceptable to the Almighty? Perhaps some of the professors were “humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they [were] led, that in many instances they [did] err because they [were] taught by the precepts of men” (2 Nephi 28:14).

Perhaps some honest efforts were being made by a few, but whatever was being done was insufficient "to teach any man the right way" (2 Nephi 25:28-29).

7. Joseph learned that "the testimony of James [was] true—that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain, and not be upbraided" (Joseph Smith—History 1:26).

He also learned that a soul in the early nineteenth century was just as precious unto God as a soul in Moses' time or in the meridian of time, else why would the Lord appear? (see Alma 39:17).

8. Soon thereafter, Joseph learned "that God had a work for [him] to do" and that his name should be made known among all nations, kindreds, and tongues (see Joseph Smith—History 1:33).

Such prophecy has been fulfilled as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been established and as the fulness of the gospel has been preached in all the world.

Yes, it all started so quietly, so simply, and so very wonderfully. A believing boy took "one small step" and prayed. A loving Father in Heaven listened and responded. What has resulted is rightfully referred to as "one giant leap for mankind."

The importance of the First Vision

All the towers ever built and all the spaceships ever launched pale in comparison with Joseph Smith's first vision. Though men fly higher and higher into the heavens, they will not find God or see his face unless they humble themselves, pray, and heed the truths revealed through the Prophet of the Restoration.

Some have foolishly said, "Take away Joseph Smith and his prayer in the grove and the First Vision and we can accept your message." Such people

would have us bury the treasure of saving truths already cited, and many more, and turn our backs to "the most important event that had taken place in all world history from the day of Christ's ministry to the glorious hour when it occurred" (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968], p. 285).

Joseph Smith "lived great" and "died great in the eyes of God" (D&C 135:3). He "has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it" (135:3).

His prayer was—

One small step for a [young] man,

[but]

one giant leap for mankind.

[It proved that]

There isn't a thing that man cannot do,

[if he has faith, trusts in the Lord, and]

If he takes one small step at a time.

[Art Harris, "One Small Step"]

Yes, "praise to the man who communed with Jehovah" (*Hymns*, no. 27) and who was instrumental in translating the Book of Mormon, restoring the holy priesthood, organizing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and revealing the fulness of the gospel.

I know that Joseph Smith was a prophet, for the fruits of his labors are sweet and abiding, and the Holy Spirit has borne witness to my soul. I feel honored to blend my voice with the chorus of millions who testify of his greatness and divine calling. I also know that "the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls" (Alma 37:7). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.