

President Gordon B. Hinckley

President Benson is with us

It is wonderful to have President Benson with us as we open this great world conference of the Church. His smile upon us and the wave of his hand mean much to all of us. Wherever we go, at home or abroad, we receive the same request: "Give our love to President Benson."

President, I am confident I speak for all who participate with us today when I say we respect you, we honor you, we love you as the prophet of the Lord in our time.

In your behalf, I convey your love and blessing upon the Saints everywhere, and likewise your testimony as spoken on previous occasions. These are your own words:

Christ is the light

"No other single influence has had so great an impact on this earth as the life of Jesus the Christ. We cannot conceive of our lives without his teachings. Without him we would be lost in a mirage of beliefs and worships, born in

fear and darkness where the sensual and materialistic hold sway. We are far short of the goal he set for us, but we must never lose sight of it; nor must we forget that our great climb toward the light, toward perfection, would not be possible except for his teachings, his life, his death, and his resurrection" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1971, p. 19; or *Ensign*, June 1971, p. 34).

I testify that Christ is the light to all mankind. He has "pointed, marked out and lighted the way. 'Sadly, many individuals and nations have extinguished that light. They have attempted to supplant His gospel with coercion and the sword'" ("Myriad of Lights to Remind of Savior," *Church News*, 4 Dec. 1982, p. 10). But even to those who reject Him, He is "the light [which] shineth in darkness" (John 1:5).

Thank you, our prophet dear, and please be assured of our prayers. May our Heavenly Father continue to bless you.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve will now speak to us.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

Contributions of the Smith family

A relatively simple but significant event took place in Nauvoo, Illinois, on the fourth of August this year. After many months of careful planning, the descendants of Joseph Smith, Sr., and Lucy Mack Smith dedicated the refurbished Smith Family Cemetery and opened it to the public.

As I attended the dedicatory services, my thoughts were centered on the remarkable contribution the family of Joseph Smith, Sr., and Lucy Mack Smith made toward the restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I was thinking especially of the Prophet, his brother Hyrum, and their parents.

I believe the Smith family burial plot should have a special meaning to every member of the Church. We all want those who are interred there to rise up on resurrection day in a beautiful garden spot. The Prophet said in a funeral sermon:

"I will tell you what I want. If tomorrow I shall be called to lie in yonder tomb, in the morning of the resurrection let me strike hands with my father, and cry, 'My father,' and he will say, 'My son, my son,' as soon as the rock rends and before we come out of our graves. . . .

"And when the voice calls for the dead to arise, suppose I am laid by the

side of my father, what would be the first joy of my heart? To meet my father, my mother, my brother, my sister; and when they are by my side, I embrace them and they me" (*History of the Church*, 5:361-62).

Each person who has a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ should love and appreciate Joseph Smith, Jr., for he is "the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, [who] 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).

The ancient prophet Nephi wrote that he was "born of goodly parents" (1 Nephi 1:1). So was the Prophet Joseph Smith; he once declared, "Words and language are inadequate to express the gratitude that I owe to God for having given me so honorable a parentage" (*History of the Church*, 5:126).

Joseph Smith, Sr.

The Lord foreordained his father, Joseph Smith, Sr., who is spoken of in the holy scriptures, to be one of the earthly parents of the Prophet. Joseph of Egypt prophesied that the latter-day seer whom God would raise up to do his work would be "called Joseph" (Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:33), and his name would "be after the name of his father" (2 Nephi 3:15). The heavenly messenger Moroni admonished young Joseph to go to his father following a glorious night of sacred instruction. In Joseph's words, this messenger "commanded me to go to my father and tell him of the vision and commandments which I had received. I obeyed; I returned to my father in the field, and rehearsed the whole matter to him. He replied to me that it was of God, and told me to go and do as commanded by the messenger" (Joseph Smith—History 1:49-50).

Joseph Smith, Sr., was in tune with the Spirit of the Lord. He knew that his young son spoke the truth. He not only believed the boy's words but encouraged him in the work he had been called to do.

Joseph, Sr., endured ridicule and persecution because of his prophet son's experiences and claims. Yet he was unwavering in his loving support and defended his son.

He saw and handled the plates of gold from which the Book of Mormon was translated and testified throughout his life to the truthfulness of that sacred book. His name remains firmly affixed, with those of the other witnesses to the Book of Mormon, in the front pages of that second witness of Jesus Christ. On one occasion he was imprisoned and told he would be released if he would deny the Book of Mormon. Not only did he *not* deny it, but he converted two persons during his thirty-day confinement.

President Lorenzo Snow said: "I do not know that any man among the Saints was more loved than Father Smith; and when any one was seriously sick Father Smith would be called for, whether it was night or day. He was as noble and generous a man as I have ever known" (quoted in LeRoi C. Snow, "How Lorenzo Snow Found God," *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1937, p. 84).

At the time of his death, Joseph Smith, Sr., was described as "a man faithful to his God and to the Church in every situation and under all circumstances through which he was called to pass" (*History of the Church*, 4:192).

Just a few months after Joseph Smith, Sr., passed from this life, the Lord revealed that the Prophet's father was in His presence, and "blessed and holy is he, for he is mine" (D&C 124:19). Indeed, Joseph Smith, Sr., played a vital role in establishing the kingdom of God upon the earth.

Lucy Mack Smith

Perhaps less visible than the Prophet's father, but equally important in shaping and influencing his life, was his mother, Lucy Mack Smith. Although this strong woman gave occasional leadership, her primary role appeared to be support to the family. She gave birth to eleven children and endured faithfully as all but four preceded her in death. During her life, she watched six of her immediate family and one grandson die as a result of ruthless mob violence and persecution.

Lucy prepared herself early in her marriage to raise a prophet. On one occasion she became seriously ill, and the doctors said she would die. Lucy records that she "made a solemn covenant with God that if He would let me live I would endeavor to serve him according to the best of my abilities." After a voice assured her that she would live, she told her mother, "The Lord will let me live, if I am faithful to the promise which I made to him, to be a comfort to my mother, my husband, and my children" (Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, ed. Preston Nibley [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958], pp. 34-35).

She gave continual encouragement, support, and strength to her son Joseph the Prophet. His mother was the first person with whom young Joseph shared some of his momentous experiences of the Sacred Grove. Years later, he shared with her the joy and relief he felt when the Lord allowed others to view the sacred plates of gold. Lucy wrote that "Joseph threw himself down beside me, and exclaimed, . . . 'You do not know how happy I am: the Lord has now caused the plates to be shown to three more besides myself. They have seen an angel, . . . and they will have to bear witness to the truth of what I have said, for now they know for themselves, that I do not go about to deceive the

people, and I feel as if I was relieved of a burden which was almost too heavy for me to bear'" (Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, p. 152).

The Prophet's mother shared also in his sorrows, sufferings, and persecutions. One time a mob took Joseph and his brother Hyrum prisoner and threatened to shoot them. The two brothers were confined under a cloth cover in a wagon. Their courageous mother risked her life and forced her way through the hostile mob to comfort her sons. Joseph and Hyrum could not see their mother and could only extend a hand from under the confining cover. As Lucy's hand and the hands of her sons touched, the wagon drove off, literally tearing the sorrowing mother from her two sons.

Her determination to testify to the restoration of the gospel may have led her to dictate her well-known *History of Joseph Smith*. This was a major undertaking in her day. The book's importance to the Church today is immeasurable! It contains many details of the Prophet Joseph's life that might never have been known otherwise. It stands as a monument to the devotion of Lucy Mack Smith and her family.

Like great parents of all ages, Lucy turned to prayer for divine help to sustain her family. During the march from Ohio to Missouri known as Zion's Camp, Joseph and Hyrum were seriously ill with cholera, and their lives were almost taken. At one point, "Hyrum sprang to his feet and exclaimed, 'Joseph, we shall return to our families. I have had an open vision, in which I saw mother kneeling under an apple tree; and she is even now asking God, in tears, to spare our lives. . . . The Spirit testifies, that her prayers . . . will be answered'" (Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, p. 229).

In the exercise of agency and in the divine providence of God, Lucy's sons Joseph and Hyrum ultimately

sealed their testimonies with their blood. As the grieving mother looked upon their lifeless remains, she cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken this family!" As a kind blessing to a faithful mother, the Lord softened her grief and granted to her the peace that only God can bestow. A voice spoke to her soul: "I have taken them to myself, that they might have rest" (Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, p. 324).

Hyrum Smith

Hyrum Smith, older brother, friend, and mentor to the Prophet, showed absolute, unequivocal love, loyalty, and allegiance to the Lord and to his younger brother Joseph. Their brotherhood may be unsurpassed. The scriptures tell us, "In life they were not divided, and in death they were not separated!" (D&C 135:3).

Of Hyrum, Joseph said, "I could pray in my heart that all my brethren were like unto my beloved brother Hyrum, who possesses the mildness of a lamb, and the integrity of a Job, and in short, the meekness and humility of Christ; and I love him with that love that is stronger than death, for I never had occasion to rebuke him, nor he me" (*History of the Church*, 2:338).

Throughout Hyrum's life, he guarded his younger brother as tenderly as if the Prophet had been his own son. Joseph surely knew the value of true and faithful associates because he had trusted many who later proved to be false.

In addition to Joseph's tribute, the Lord spoke of His love for Hyrum: "Blessed is my servant Hyrum Smith; for I, the Lord, love him because of the integrity of his heart, and because he loveth that which is right before me, saith the Lord" (D&C 124:15).

Hyrum was unwavering, even in the face of death. Following one period

of great deprivation and persecution, he wrote:

"I thank God that I felt a determination to die, rather than deny the things which my eyes had seen, which my hands had handled [the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated], and which I had borne testimony to, wherever my lot had been cast; and I can assure my beloved brethren that I was enabled to bear as strong a testimony, when nothing but death presented itself, as ever I did in my life" ("Communications," *Times and Seasons*, Dec. 1839, p. 23).

Lessons from Joseph and Hyrum

From the Prophet Joseph and Hyrum, we can learn many valuable lessons. I share just these two examples today. In a letter dated March 15, 1844, just a few months before his martyrdom, Hyrum wrote:

"Now, therefore, I say unto you, you must cease preaching your miraculous things, and let the mysteries alone until by and bye. Preach faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; repentance and baptism for the remission of sins; the laying on of the hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost; teaching the necessity of strict obedience unto these principles; reasoning out of the scriptures; proving them unto the people. Cease your schisms and divisions, and your contentions. Humble yourselves" (*Times and Seasons*, 15 Mar. 1844, p. 474).

And then from the Prophet Joseph:

"There are those who profess to be Saints who are too apt to murmur, and find fault, when any advice is given, which comes in opposition to their feelings, even when they, themselves, ask for counsel; much more so when counsel is given unasked for, which does not agree with their notion of things; but brethren, we hope for better things from the most of you; we

trust that you desire counsel, from time to time, and that you will cheerfully conform to it, whenever you receive it from a proper source" (*History of the Church*, 4:45).

These inspired statements from Hyrum and Joseph to Church members in their day are certainly appropriate for Church members today. While standing in Nauvoo at the foot of the headstone of these noble men, I had the impression that they would have me counsel all members of the Church to remain anchored to the basic and simple principles of the gospel. Study the scriptures; look to the leaders of the Church for guidance in these troubled times. Brothers and sisters, be careful of the schisms, divisions, and contentions that are among us today. Keep the commandments so the Holy Ghost will be with you in your search for truth and knowledge.

I bear humble witness that Joseph Smith is one of the great, noble ones to come to the earth. He and his brother Hyrum deserve our honor, respect, and gratitude as do other members of their family who assisted with the restora-

tion of the fulness of the gospel. I testify that President Ezra Taft Benson is the prophet of God at this time, and the Apostles and other General Authorities, who are seated on this stand, are ordained of God to preside over the Church. Jesus, our Lord and Savior, stands at the head of the Church. Our Heavenly Father lives and watches over each of His children. To this I humbly testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The chorus sang "The Lord Is My Shepherd" without announcement.

President Hinckley

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Twelve Apostles has spoken to us, followed by the chorus singing "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

Elder Robert L. Backman of the Presidency of the Seventy will now address us, and he will be followed by Elder Ted E. Brewerton of the Seventy.

Elder Robert L. Backman

While abridging the records of the Nephites, Mormon wrote: "Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life" (3 Nephi 5:13). This humble yet straightforward declaration ought to express the feelings of all Latter-day Saints—disciples of Christ called to minister in his cause.

Christ—more than a king

Who is this Jesus whom we worship? Above all people on earth, we Latter-day Saints should appreciate the vital significance of Jesus of Nazareth—his role in the plan of salvation,

his virgin birth, his immaculate life, his powerful teachings, his selfless death, his glorious resurrection, his guidance of his Church.

In Lloyd Douglas's book *The Robe* is an imaginative account of the entry of Christ into Jerusalem, riding a donkey. Amid the hysteria of the excited multitude, ignorant of the significance of the event and of its chief Actor, occurs a conversation between two Greek slaves:

"See him—close up?" [asked the uncouth Athenian].

"Demetrius nodded; . . . turning away. . . .

"Crazy?" persisted the Athenian. . . .