

Sacrifice and legacy of the pioneers

One hundred and fifty years ago our people were leaving Nauvoo and threading their way across the prairies of Iowa. None of us, I am confident, can appreciate the measure of sacrifice which they made in leaving their comfortable homes to brave the tempests of the wilderness on a journey that would not end until they reached this valley of the Great Salt Lake. Their suffering was immeasurable. They died by the hundreds for this cause of which each one of us is a part.

I was in Palmyra this past summer, and in Nauvoo, and in Council Bluffs, Iowa, which they had called Kaneshville out of respect and love for a loyal friend. I stood where the Grand Encampment assembled when they reached the Missouri River. I have been over the trail from the Missouri to this valley a number of times. For me it is always a sacred experience. I am so deeply grateful for our inheritance. We shall remember it in a special way next year when we commemorate the arrival of our pioneer forebears in this valley.

Ours is the blessing to live in a better season. The terrible persecutions of the past are behind us. Today we are looked upon with respect by people across the world. We must always be worthy of that respect. We must earn it, or we will not have it. We will be reminded of that principle during this conference.

Promises to those who listen

I invite you to listen, listen if you will by the power of the Spirit, to the speakers who will address you today and tomorrow as well as this evening. If you will do so, I do not hesitate to promise that you will be uplifted, your resolution to do what is right will be stronger, you will find solutions to your problems and your needs, and you will be led to thank the Lord for what you have heard.

We have become as a great family spread across this vast world. We speak different tongues. We live under a variety of circumstances. But in the heart of each of us beats a common testimony: You and I know that God lives and is at the helm of this His holy work. We know that Jesus is our Redeemer, who stands at the head of this Church which carries His name. We know that Joseph Smith was a prophet and is a prophet who stands at the head of this, the dispensation of the fullness of times. We know that the priesthood was restored upon his head and that it has come down to us in this day in an unbroken line. We know that the Book of Mormon is a true testament of the reality and divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our testimony of these and other matters will be strengthened, our faith will be deepened as we participate together in this great and sacred convocation.

For this I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Boyd K. Packer

Jesus calls the Twelve Apostles

In the course of organizing His Church, Jesus "went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he

named apostles."¹ They were called from the ordinary paths of life.

Peter was the first called, and the Lord said to him, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be

loosed in heaven.”² This same sacred authority is inherent in the ordination of every Apostle.

Paul taught that the apostles and prophets were called “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,” and he declared that these offices would endure “till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”³

The Apostasy and the Restoration

The Apostles in time were gone and, with them, the keys. Paul had prophesied of men being “carried about with every wind of doctrine.”⁴

And so it was; instead of unity of faith, there came division and disunity.

It was in this circumstance that young Joseph Smith prayed to know which of all the churches was true and which he should join.

Joseph’s vision of the Father and the Son opened this dispensation. Then came the restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ with the same organization that existed in the primitive Church, built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets.⁵

Some suppose that the organization was handed to the Prophet Joseph Smith like a set of plans and specifications for a building, with all of the details known at the beginning. But it did not come that way. Rather, it came a piece at a time as the Brethren were ready and as they inquired of God.

The Melchizedek Priesthood, the consummate authority given to man from God, was restored under the hands of Peter, James, and John. By them, the Lord said:

“I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles, and especial witnesses of my name, and bear the keys of your ministry and of the same things which I revealed unto them;

“Unto whom I have committed the keys of my kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times.”⁶

The First Presidency was in place by 1833; then two years later, in February of 1835, came the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. And that is as it should be. The First Presidency came first in sequence and stands first in authority. And true to the pattern, it was made of men called from the ordinary pursuits of life.

Apostles are prophets, seers, and revelators

With the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve in place, with the offices of the Seventy and the Presiding Bishopric revealed, the proper order of things prevails. But there is a difference. Perhaps President J. Reuben Clark said it best:

“Some of the General Authorities [the Apostles] have had assigned to them a special calling; they possess a special gift; they are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators, which gives them a special spiritual endowment in connection with their teaching of [this] people. They have the right, the power, and the authority to declare the mind and will of God to his people, subject to the overall power and authority of the President of the Church. Others of the General Authorities are not given this special spiritual endowment . . . ; the resulting limitation . . . applies to every other officer and member of the Church, for none of them is spiritually endowed as a prophet, seer, and revelator.”⁷

Furthermore, President Clark said that among those of the Twelve and the Presidency, “only the President of the Church, the Presiding High Priest, is sustained as Prophet, Seer, and Revelator for the Church, and he alone has the right to receive revelations for the Church, either new or amendatory, or to give authoritative interpretations of

scriptures that shall be binding on the Church, or change in any way the existing doctrines of the Church."⁸

It took a generation of asking and receiving before the order of things as we know it today was firmly in place. Each move to perfect that order has come about in response to a need and in answer to prayer. And that process continues in our day.

The ministry of the Twelve

"The Twelve are a Traveling Presiding High Council, to officiate in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Presidency of the Church, agreeable to the institution of heaven; to build up the church, and regulate all the affairs of the same in all nations."⁹

Where the First Presidency cannot go, the Twelve are sent "to unlock the door of the kingdom in all places."¹⁰ They are commissioned to go to all the world, for the word *Apostle* means "one [who is] sent forth."¹¹

"Wherefore," the Lord said, "in whatsoever place ye shall proclaim my name an effectual door shall be opened unto you, that they may receive my word."¹² And He promised, "Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers."¹³

The Twelve Apostles "are called to be . . . special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world."¹⁴ Each carries that certain witness that Jesus is the Christ. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that "every member of the Church should have the impressions on his soul made by the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Son of God indelibly pictured so that they cannot be forgotten."¹⁵

From Nephi we know that "angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost."¹⁶ Mormon told us that "the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the

covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men." Mormon further explained that angels accomplish their ministry "by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him. And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father, the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men."¹⁷

Apostles have the gift of discernment

There is a power of discernment granted "unto such as God shall appoint . . . to watch over [his] church."¹⁸ To discern means "to see."

President Harold B. Lee told me once of a conversation he had with Elder Charles A. Callis of the Quorum of the Twelve. Brother Callis had remarked that the gift of discernment was an awesome burden to carry. To see clearly what is ahead and yet find members slow to respond or resistant to counsel or even rejecting the witness of the apostles and prophets brings deep sorrow.

Nevertheless, "the responsibility of leading this church" must rest upon us until "you shall appoint others to succeed you."¹⁹

Warning to wrongful critics

The Lord warned us of those few in the Church "who have professed to know my name and have not known me, and have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house."²⁰

"Thy voice," the Lord commanded the Twelve, "shall be a rebuke unto the transgressor; and at thy rebuke let the tongue of the slanderer cease its perverseness."²¹

Some few within the Church openly, or perhaps far worse in the darkness of anonymity, reproach their leaders in the wards and stakes and in the Church, seeking to make them "an offender for a word,"²² as Isaiah said. To them the Lord said:

"Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord, and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned . . . but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them.

"But those who cry transgression do it because they are the servants of sin, and are the children of disobedience themselves. . . .

". . . Because they have offended my little ones they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house.

"Their basket shall not be full, their houses and their barns shall perish, and they themselves shall be despised by those that flattered them.

"They shall not have right to the priesthood, nor their posterity after them from generation to generation."²³

That terrible penalty will not apply to those who try as best they can to live the gospel and sustain their leaders. Nor need it apply to those who in the past have been guilty of indifference or even opposition if they will repent, confess their transgressions, and forsake them.²⁴

Unity of First Presidency and Twelve

Recently President Hinckley reminded the Brethren that, while we are men called from the ordinary pursuits of life, there rests upon us a sacred ministry. And we take comfort in what the Lord said to the original Twelve: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you."²⁵

While each feels his own limitation, there is strength in unity. Never in the history of the Church have the Brethren of the First Presidency and the Twelve been more united.

Each week we meet together in the temple. We open the meeting by kneeling in prayer, and we close with prayer. Every prayer is offered in the spirit of submission and obedience to Him who called us and whose servants and witnesses we are.

The Lord requires that "every decision made by either of these quorums must be by the unanimous voice of the same" and that "the decisions of these quorums . . . are to be made in all righteousness, in holiness, and lowliness of heart, meekness and long suffering, and in faith, and virtue, and knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity."²⁶ This we earnestly strive to do.

We know that we hold the power of the priesthood "in connection with all those who have received a dispensation at any time from the beginning of the creation."²⁷ We think of those who have preceded us in these sacred offices, and at times we feel their presence.

We are overcome with what the Lord said of those who hold these sacred callings: "Whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation."²⁸

Heed the counsel of the Lord's servants

During a very difficult time, the Lord gave the sternest warning that I know of in all scripture. It had to do with the building of the Nauvoo Temple. The Saints knew from experience that to proceed to build a temple would bring terrible persecution, so they delayed. The Lord extended the time and said, "If you do not these things at the end of the appointment ye shall be rejected as a church, with your dead, saith the Lord your God."²⁹

Often overlooked in that revelation is a marvelous promise: "If my people will hearken unto my voice, and unto the voice of my servants whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold, verily I say unto you, they shall not be moved out of their place."³⁰

Remember this promise; hold on to it. It should be a great comfort to those struggling to keep a family together in a society increasingly indifferent to, and even hostile toward, those standards which are essential to a happy family.

The promise is a restatement of what the Lord told the multitude: "Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants."³¹

I repeat the promise that those who hearken to the voice of these men whom the Lord has raised up "shall not be moved out of their place."³²

But the promise was followed with this caution: "But if they will not hearken to my voice, nor unto the voice of these men whom I have appointed, they shall not be blest."³³

A special witness that Jesus is the Christ

The most precious thing we have to give is our witness of the Lord, our testimony of Jesus Christ.

I certify to you that the 14 men with whom I share the ordination are indeed Apostles. In declaring this, I say no more than the Lord has taught, no more than may be revealed to anyone who seeks with a sincere heart and real intent for an individual witness of the Spirit.

These men are true servants of the Lord; give heed to their counsel. So, too, with the Seventy, who as especial witnesses carry an apostolic responsibility, and the Bishopric, worthy men of God. So, too, with the brethren and sisters across the world who are called to lead,

who have earned that knowledge precious above all else.

There are limits to what the Spirit permits us to say.³⁴ And so I close with my witness, my special witness, that Jesus is the Christ, that through a prophet-president He presides over this, "the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth."³⁵ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Luke 6:12-13.
2. Matthew 16:19.
3. Ephesians 4:12-13.
4. Ephesians 4:14.
5. See Articles of Faith 1:6; Ephesians 2:20.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 27:12-13.
7. J. Reuben Clark Jr., "When Are Church Leader's Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture?" *Church News*, 31 July 1954, 9-10.
8. *Church News*, 31 July 1954, 10.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 107:33.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 112:17; see also Doctrine and Covenants 107:35; 124:128.
11. Bible Dictionary, "Apostle," 612.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 112:19.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 112:10.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 107:23.
15. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Twelve Apostles* (address to seminary and institute faculty, 18 June 1958), 6.
16. 2 Nephi 32:3.
17. Moroni 7:31-32.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 46:27.
19. Declaration of the Twelve Apostles, reporting March 1844 meeting of the Twelve, Brigham Young Papers, Historical Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 112:26.
21. Doctrine and Covenants 112:9.
22. Isaiah 29:21; see also 2 Nephi 27:32.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 121:16-17, 19-21.
24. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:43.

25. John 15:16.
26. Doctrine and Covenants 107:27, 30.
27. Doctrine and Covenants 112:31.
28. Doctrine and Covenants 68:4.
29. Doctrine and Covenants 124:32.
30. Doctrine and Covenants 124:45.
31. 3 Nephi 12:1.
32. Doctrine and Covenants 124:45.
33. Doctrine and Covenants 124:46.
34. See Alma 12:9.
35. Doctrine and Covenants 1:30.

The chorus sang "Though Deepening Trials."

President Hinckley

President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has spoken to us, and the chorus has sung "Though Deepening Trials."

Elder L. Aldin Porter of the Presidency of the Seventy will now address us.

Elder L. Aldin Porter

The First Vision changed the world

One hundred seventy-six years ago, an event occurred which lies at the very foundation of the Restoration of the gospel in these latter days. It is, in my judgment, the most significant event that has occurred in this world since the Son of God walked forth from the tomb a resurrected being. I refer to that first heavenly vision that came to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Let me read his words:

"It was on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty. It was the first time in my life that I had made such an attempt, for amidst all my anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally.

"After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God."

He then described a few moments of severe spiritual anguish, convincing him that the forces of evil were real and powerful. Then he continued:

"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. 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!*"¹

That single event changed the future of the world. The appearance of the Father and the Son to the young prophet ushered in the dispensation of the fullness of times. It exemplified God's love for His children and changed the world forever.

Testimony comes by revelation

How can one know of a surety that Joseph Smith actually saw and conversed with the Father and the Son? How can one ascertain the truthfulness of our bold assertion that God speaks to the world today through His prophets? God has provided a way.

Speaking of the supernal glory of that First Vision, President Gordon B. Hinckley has said: "Much has been written, much will be written, in an effort to