

# Shall We Not Go On in So Great a Cause?

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We should always remember the price Joseph and Hyrum Smith paid, along with so many other faithful men, women, and children, to establish the Church.

Thank you very much, President, for such a wonderful opening. Brothers and sisters, 215 years ago, a little boy was born to Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith in Vermont in a region known as New England in the northeastern United States.

Joseph and Lucy Mack believed in Jesus Christ, studied the holy scriptures, sincerely prayed, and walked with faith in God.

They named their new baby son Joseph Smith Jr.

Of the Smith family, Brigham Young said: “The Lord had his eye upon [Joseph Smith], and upon his father, and upon his father’s father, and upon their progenitors clear back to Abraham, and from Abraham to the flood, from the flood to Enoch and from Enoch to Adam. He has watched that family and that blood as it has circulated from its fountain to the birth of that man. [Joseph Smith] was foreordained in eternity.”<sup>1</sup>

Beloved by his family, Joseph Jr. was particularly close to his older brother Hyrum, who was nearly six years of age when Joseph was born.

Last October, I sat by the hearthstone that was in the small Smith home in Sharon, Vermont, where Joseph was born. I felt Hyrum’s love for Joseph and thought of him holding his baby brother in his arms and teaching him how to walk.

Father and Mother Smith experienced personal setbacks, forcing them to move their family numerous times before finally giving up on New England and making the courageous decision to move farther west, to New York State.

Because the family was united, they survived these challenges and together faced the daunting task of starting over again on a hundred-acre (0.4 km<sup>2</sup>) wooded tract of land in Manchester, near Palmyra, New York.

I am not sure that many of us realize the physical and emotional challenges that starting over presented the Smith family—clearing land, planting orchards and fields, building a small log home and other farm structures, hiring out as day laborers, and making home goods to sell in town.

By the time the family arrived in western New York, the area was ablaze with religious fervor—known as the Second Great Awakening.

During this time of debate and strife among religious parties, Joseph experienced a wondrous vision, known today as the First Vision. We are blessed to have four primary accounts from which I will draw.<sup>2</sup>

Joseph recorded: “During this time of great [religious] excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit. ... [Yet] so great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong.”<sup>3</sup>

Joseph turned to the Bible to find answers to his questions and read James 1:5: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”<sup>4</sup>

He noted: “Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man 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.”<sup>5</sup>

Joseph came to realize that the Bible did not contain all the answers to life’s questions; rather, it taught men and women how they could find answers to their questions by communicating directly with God through prayer.

He added: “So, in accordance with this, my determination to ask of God, I retired to the woods to make the attempt. It was on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty.”<sup>6</sup>

Soon thereafter, Joseph said that “[a pillar of] light rested upon me [and] 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—[Joseph,] *This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*”<sup>7</sup>

The Savior then spoke: “Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee. Go thy way, walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments. Behold, I am the Lord of glory. I was crucified for the world, that all those who believe on my name may have eternal life.”<sup>8</sup>

Joseph added, “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.”<sup>9</sup>

He recalled: “They told me that all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom. And ... at the same time [I] receive[d] a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.”<sup>10</sup>

Joseph also noted, “I saw many angels in this vision.”<sup>11</sup>

Following this glorious vision, Joseph wrote: “My soul was filled with love, and for many days I could rejoice with great joy. ... The Lord was with me.”<sup>12</sup>

He emerged from the Sacred Grove to begin his preparation to become a prophet of God.

Joseph also began to learn what ancient prophets experienced—rejection, opposition, and persecution. Joseph recalled sharing what he had seen and heard with one of the ministers who had been active in the religious revival:

“I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them.

“I soon found, however, that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase; ... and this was common among all the sects—all united to persecute me.”<sup>13</sup>

Three years later, in 1823, the heavens opened again as part of the continuing Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the last days. Joseph noted that an angel named Moroni appeared to him and said “that God had a work for me to do ... [and that] there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates” that contained “the fulness of the everlasting Gospel ... as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants [of the Americas].”<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, Joseph obtained, translated, and published the ancient record, known today as the Book of Mormon.

His brother Hyrum, who had been his constant supporter, especially following his painful, life-threatening leg operation in 1813, was one of the witnesses of the gold plates. He was also one of the six members of the Church of Jesus Christ when it was organized in 1830.

During their lives, Joseph and Hyrum faced mobs and persecution together. For example, they languished in the most wretched conditions in the Liberty Jail in Missouri for five months during the cold winter of 1838–39.

In April 1839, Joseph wrote his wife Emma describing their situation in Liberty Jail: “I believe it is now about five months and six days since I have been under the grimace of a guard, night and day, and within the walls, grates, and screeching iron doors of a lonesome, dark, dirty prison. ... We shall be moved from this [place] at any rate, and we are glad of it. Let what will become of us, we cannot get into a worse hole than this is. ... We shall never cast a lingering wish after Liberty in Clay County, Missouri. We have enough of it to last forever.”<sup>15</sup>

In the face of persecution, Hyrum exhibited faith in the Lord’s promises, including a guarantee to escape his enemies if he so chose. In a blessing Hyrum received in 1835 under the hands of Joseph Smith, the Lord promised him: “Thou shalt have power to escape the hand of thine enemies. Thy life shall be sought with untiring zeal, but thou shalt escape. *If it please thee, and thou desirest, thou shalt have the power voluntarily to lay down thy life to glorify God.*”<sup>16</sup>

In June 1844, Hyrum was presented the choice to live or to lay down his life to glorify God and to “seal his testimony with his blood”—side by side together with his beloved brother Joseph.<sup>17</sup>

A week before the fateful trip to Carthage, where they were murdered in cold blood by an armed mob of cowards who had painted their faces to avoid detection, Joseph recorded that “I advised my brother Hyrum to take his family on the next steamboat and go to Cincinnati.”

I still feel great emotion as I remember Hyrum’s reply: “Joseph, *I can’t leave you.*”<sup>18</sup>

So Joseph and Hyrum went to Carthage, where they became martyrs for Christ’s cause and name.

The official announcement of the martyrdom stated the following: “Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, ... has brought forth the Book of Mormon, which he translated by the gift and power of God, and has been the means of publishing it on two continents; has sent the fulness of the everlasting gospel, which it contained, to the four quarters of the earth; has brought forth the revelations and commandments which compose this book of Doctrine and Covenants, and many other wise documents and instructions for the benefit of the children of men; gathered many thousands of the Latter-day Saints, founded a great city, and left a fame and name that cannot be slain. ... And like most of the Lord’s anointed in ancient times, [Joseph] has sealed his mission and his works with his own blood; and so has his brother Hyrum. *In life they were not divided, and in death they were not separated!*”<sup>19</sup>

Following the martyrdom, Joseph’s and Hyrum’s bodies were returned to Nauvoo, washed, and dressed so the Smith family could see their loved ones. Their precious mother recalled: “I had for a long time braced every nerve, roused every energy of my soul, and called upon God to strengthen me; but when I entered the room, and saw my murdered sons extended both at once before my eyes, and heard the sobs and groans of my family [and] the cries ... from the lips of their wives, children, brothers, and sisters, it was too much. I sank back crying to the Lord in the agony of my soul, ‘My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken this family?’”<sup>20</sup>

At that moment of sorrow and distress, she recalled them saying, “Mother, weep not for us; we have overcome the world by love.”<sup>21</sup>

They had indeed overcome the world. Joseph and Hyrum Smith, like those faithful Saints described in the book of Revelation, “came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb [and] are ... before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

“For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their

eyes.”<sup>22</sup>

As we celebrate this joyous occasion, the 200th anniversary of the First Vision, we should always remember the price Joseph and Hyrum Smith paid, along with so many other faithful men, women, and children, to establish the Church so you and I could enjoy the many blessings and all of these revealed truths we have today. Their faithfulness should never be forgotten!

I have often wondered why Joseph and Hyrum and their families had to suffer so much. It may be that they came to know God through their suffering in ways that could not have happened without it. Through it, they reflected on Gethsemane and the cross of the Savior. As Paul said, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.”<sup>23</sup>

Before his death in 1844, Joseph wrote a spirited letter to the Saints. It was a call to action, which continues in the Church today:

“Brethren [and sisters], *shall we not go on in so great a cause?* Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren [and sisters]; and on, on to the victory! ...

“... Let us, therefore, as a church and a people, and as Latter-day Saints, offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.”<sup>24</sup>

As we listen to the Spirit during this 200th anniversary celebration this weekend, consider what offering you will present to the Lord in righteousness in the coming days. Be courageous—share it with someone you trust, and most important, please take the time to do it!

I know that the Savior is pleased when we present Him an offering from our hearts in righteousness, just as He was pleased with the faithful offering of those remarkable brothers, Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and all other faithful Saints. Of this I solemnly testify in the sacred and holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ, amen.