

Keep the Covenant: Do the Work

© Denver C. Snuffer, Jr. 2018

I have been looking forward to talking to the youth since I first learned I was invited to speak at this conference. The future always belongs to the next generation. If the next generation is not able to learn and continue their parents' faith, every achievement can be lost.

All intelligence, talent and skill is perishable. Unless studied, knowledge can be forfeited. It is by your effort to preserve what has been newly restored that the covenant given by God will endure. Every past covenant has been broken. There are still remnants who benefit from past covenants, but today only one covenant exists intact.

Many of you are being raised apart from formal, institutional church organizations. You are being taught in your homes, instead of church-owned buildings. Your experience will be very different from that of some of your friends. It helps you to understand that God can be close to you wherever you worship Him. Most of your parents, when they were children, likely experienced religion only in a formal, organized setting with officials leading and controlling everything. Now they ask you to commit to following God with much more of the responsibility resting on you.

Institutional, formal churches invest in programs and productions to help their members believe in God. Institutions pre-package what is taught, so their members will agree with them on religious worship. God has provided us with scriptures, and given you the ability to read and think. You need to find God directly, and to let your religion include your individual search for truth.

Joseph Smith defined "Mormonism" in this way: "One of the grand fundamental principles of 'Mormonism' is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may."¹ We all want to freely search for truth, and when we find it, we want to be free to accept it. That is Mormonism. That is us.

There is a new edition of scriptures available in paperback and on-line. They will soon be available in a leather bound edition. These new scriptures are the most accurate and complete volumes of Joseph Smith's work made available. If you study them, your understanding of the restoration will exceed all others. Make them something you review daily, even if you only have a few minutes.

While Joseph Smith was alive, he taught that the restoration would fail if the saints did not have the new translation² of the Bible published as part of their scriptures. Joseph said, "God had often sealed up the heavens because of covetousness in the Church. Said the Lord

¹ *DHC*, 5:499.

² It is called a "translation" but was more correctly the prophet's inspired revision clarifying the text.

would cut his work short in righteousness and except the church receive the fulness of the Scriptures that they would yet fall.”³ After that warning on July 17, 1840, two men were assigned to go on a mission for the purpose of raising money to publish scriptures. This included a new edition of the Book of Mormon and the *Joseph Smith Translation* of the Bible.⁴ In October 1840, a letter to all the saints was published in the *Times and Seasons* asking for their full support in the effort to publish “the new translation of the Scriptures.”⁵ That effort failed to put the *Joseph Smith Translation* in print, and Joseph died without it ever being published. Excerpts with edits done by others were published by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, but it failed to include Joseph’s entire work.

The new edition of the scriptures is the first time the full work Joseph accomplished, without additions and including hundreds of punctuation changes previously omitted, have been made available in print. You are the first generation to have these scriptures available. Do not neglect them.

There are two things that will bring you closer to God than anything else. First, personal scripture study. Learn from them when you have time. Your private study will be more important than what others tell you about the scriptures. Second, personal prayer. Your private time spent in prayer will have the power to shape your life. If you study the scriptures when you are alone, and you pray in private, these two things, more than anything else, will draw you to God.

There is a great gulf separating us from the first fathers of mankind. At the very beginning, a book of remembrance was kept in the language of Adam.⁶ Enoch taught repentance and knowledge of God using that book of remembrance.⁷ Those records were passed down for generations until Abraham. He learned of the first fathers, the Patriarchs, from those records.⁸ Abraham wrote: “But the records of the Fathers, even the Patriarchs, concerning the right of Priesthood, the Lord, my God, preserved in mine own hands.”⁹

At the time of Abraham, Egypt was the greatest civilization on earth. Egypt was great because it imitated the original religion of the first fathers. Abraham explained:

Now the first government of Egypt was established by Pharaoh, the eldest son of Zeptah, the daughter of Ham, and it was after the manner of the government of Ham, which was Patriarchal. Pharaoh, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first Patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also Noah, his father, who blessed him with the blessings of the

³ *JS Papers, Documents Vol. 2*, p. 85, as in original. The “fulness of the Scriptures” was how Joseph referred to the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible.

⁴ See *JSP Documents Vol. 7*, p. 333.

⁵ *JSP Documents Vol. 7*, p. 412; also *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 1840, p. 178.

⁶ OC Gen. 3:14.

⁷ OC Gen. 4:5.

⁸ T&C Abr. 2:3-4.

⁹ T&C Abr. 2:4.

earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood.¹⁰

Egypt began by imitating the pattern Adam, Seth, Enos and their direct descendants through Noah used to organize the family of the faithful. Abraham calls it a “government” but it was a family. The title “Pharaoh” originally meant “great house” or “great family” because Pharaoh was the “father” over Egypt who taught and led them. Over time, however, the title “Pharaoh” came to mean “king” or “tyrant” who controlled people.

The first Pharaoh, or founding father of Egypt imitated the first fathers of mankind. He could only imitate, because he did not have the right to act as the patriarchal head of mankind. He nevertheless tried to be a shepherd who led by righteous example.

Abraham knew more about the first fathers than did the Egyptians because Abraham had the original book of remembrance written by the fathers in the language of Adam.

Today scholars are trying to understand ancient Egypt. The earlier or farther back in time you look, the closer Egypt’s imitation is to the government of Adam and the Patriarchs down to Noah.

The records of Egypt from the very earliest time are lost. But we have some records. The oldest are the Pyramid Texts. Then a few centuries later there are Coffin Texts. Then much later are the Book of the Dead Texts. Near the end we have Book of Breathing Texts. There are thousands of years between the first Pyramid Texts and the last Book of Breathing Texts.¹¹ Within those thousands of years, the religion and knowledge of Egypt became more and more corrupted.

The earliest records of the Egyptian religion carved in the Pyramid Texts date from 2,500 b.c.¹² That was before Abraham, before Joseph was sold into Egypt, before Moses, and before the Exodus from Egypt. It was long before King David, King Solomon, and Elijah. These are their earliest records.

More than two thousand years later we have the last records, The Book of Breathing Texts. These were written at about 300 b.c. They were written during the time when Greece and Rome controlled Egypt. After Alexander the Great subdued western Persia, Syria and Tyre, he conquered Egypt¹³ and became an Egyptian Pharaoh. When he died, one of Alexander’s

¹⁰ Abr. 2:3.

¹¹ Pyramid Texts: traditionally dated from 2,500 b.c., may be as early as 3,000 b.c.

Coffin Texts: date from 2,150 b.c.

Book of the Dead Texts: date from 1,500 b.c.

Book of Breathing Texts: date from 332 b.c.

¹² These may well have been based on much earlier texts, perhaps from pre-dynastic Egypt. There is evidence that when they were inscribed the priests did not altogether understand their meaning, having not preserved the necessary information from an earlier time.

¹³ The Egyptians welcomed him as a liberator. He founded new city, named Alexandria to honor him, which became the capital of Greco-Roman Egypt.

generals named Ptolemy, replaced Alexander as Pharaoh. The descendants of Ptolemy followed him as Pharaohs in what is called the Ptolemaic Dynasty.

You have probably heard of Cleopatra. She was a descendant of Ptolemy and was the Queen of Egypt at a time when Rome controlled Egypt. Rome fell into a civil war during Cleopatra's lifetime, and Mark Anthony, one of the generals of Rome, fought against Octavian hoping to become Emperor. Cleopatra sided with Mark Anthony.

Cleopatra and Mark Anthony both died by suicide when Octavian defeated the Roman-Egyptian military controlled by Mark Anthony. When Octavian won, he became the undisputed Roman Emperor and Egyptian ruler, and his name was changed to Caesar Augustus. Jesus was born while Caesar Augustus was the Roman Emperor¹⁴ and ruler of Egypt.

Beginning long before Abraham, and ending just before Christ was born, the records of Egypt were carved, painted or written. The religion of Egypt changed, and became more elaborate in places and more vague in others over those thousands of years. The very first Pyramid Texts date from the 4th Dynasty.

The next records, the Egyptian Coffin Texts, date from the 7th and 8th Dynasties. They show changes in the religion of Egypt from the earlier Pyramid Texts.

Abraham lived during the 9th or 10th Dynasty, at a time called the "1st Intermediate Period." This was a period of significant change, or apostasy, for the Egyptian religion. But even before Abraham, the order established by the first fathers, despite efforts to keep the faith, had been poorly preserved. The Pyramid Texts are the oldest records, but they were carved during the 4th and 5th Dynasties. By the time these records had been carved, six or more centuries had passed between the original and this preservation. This would be like us composing the history from the time Robert the Bruce gained Scottish independence through the death of Joan of Arc for the first time today.

After the 1st Intermediate Period came the Middle Kingdom, including the 11th through the 14th Dynasties. It was during the 1st Intermediate Period that Joseph was sold into Egypt.

The Book of the Dead dates from the New Kingdom, or 18th Dynasty. Moses lived during the beginning of the 18th Dynasty and Josephus dates the Exodus from Egypt at that point.¹⁵

Over the long time period of their history, Egyptian religion changed. It began emphasizing ascending to heaven following this life. But it later emphasized navigating the dangers of the underworld, where the dead face perils, tests and judgments. It is more accurate to say Egypt had "religions" rather than a religion, because so much changed over their history.

Solomon dedicated the Temple at Jerusalem during the 20th Dynasty, a little over 1,000 b.c.

¹⁴ See NC Luke 2:1.

¹⁵ The Book of Gates also dates from this same time. It describes the underworld passage following death.

An attempt to reconstruct the religions of Egypt requires the study of materials that date over nearly three millennia. Over that time a great deal of change, uncertainty, apostasy and error crept in. Much was lost, but also much was added. Some things were amplified or extended and represent uninspired efforts to improve on the original. Even the most meticulous scholar, using the most inspired approach, will never be able to reconstruct the original religion, or “that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first Patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam.”

Yet, God demands that our hearts turn to the fathers or we will be wasted at Christ’s return.¹⁶ This requirement is not to turn to them in just a figurative way, where we do genealogical work to connect ourselves with our recently deceased forebearers. That work is a wrongheaded effort to seal people to those kept in prison.¹⁷ The return of our hearts will require us to have the same religion, and the same beliefs in our hearts that the original fathers had beginning with Adam. Only in that way will our hearts turn to the fathers.

God declared to Abraham that the chosen descendants, the people of God who would call Abraham their father, would need to have that same religion belonging to the first fathers. God explained, “for as many as receive *this gospel* shall be called after thy name and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as unto their Father.”¹⁸ The term used by God (“this gospel”) is the original holy order the first fathers, including Adam, possessed at the beginning. Our hearts must turn to the fathers because their religion, not apostate Christianity, or Judaism, or apostate Mormonism, or some remnant or relic of Adam’s religion, but the order of the first fathers must be fully restored.

Adam still presides and still holds the keys. Joseph Smith said, “Adam holds the keys of the dispensation of the fullness of times; i.e., the dispensation of all the times have been, and will be revealed through him, from the beginning to Christ, and from Christ to the end of all the dispensations that are to be revealed.”¹⁹

In an October 1840 proclamation to the saints, Joseph and the High Council in Nauvoo hoped to see happen in 1840 what did not happen then, has not yet happened, and may only happen if people honor the covenant offered last year. The proclamation said:

The work of the Lord in these last days, is one of vast magnitude and almost beyond the comprehension of mortals; its glories are past description and its grandeur insurpassable.²⁰ It has been the theme which has animated the bosom of prophets and righteous men from the creation of this world down through every succeeding generation to the present time; and it is truly the dispensation of the fullness of times, which all things which are in Christ Jesus, whether in heaven or on the earth, shall be gathered together in him,

¹⁶ Nephi told Joseph Smith, “And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers; if it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.” (T&C 1:JS History 3:4.)

¹⁷ I’ve explained this in the essay: *The Mission of Elijah Reconsidered*.

¹⁸ Abr. 3:1, emphasis added.

¹⁹ T&C 140:3.

²⁰ The word “insurpassable” is a French word, whose English translation is “unsurpassable.”

and when all things shall be restored, as spoken of by all the holy prophets since the world began: for in it will take place the glorious fulfillment of the promises made to the fathers[.]²¹

That grandeur was not achieved in Joseph's day. The restoration has never reached the magnitude God intends. All the institutions of Mormonism are drifting away, aimlessly. They are more interested in preserving power for themselves than in preserving the restoration. Taking the scriptures as your guide, you will be better prepared than any other generation to arise and fulfill the promises and prophecies. Joseph Smith did not complete the restoration. But he laid a foundation that should not be ignored.

The Community of Christ and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are both being led down to destruction and are bound in the chains of hell because of their studied ignorance. Apostasy means a deliberate rebellion against God. They are in apostasy because they are deliberately changing the ordinances, have broken the covenant, and are rejecting Joseph Smith's teachings and revelations. They have been deliberately walking away from the restoration, and choosing to align themselves with a doomed world. This process was described by Alma:

... he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word. And he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until they know them in full. And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the Devil and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell.²²

Increasingly these largest branches of the restoration are abandoning Joseph's work and, like the Egyptians, are replacing their beliefs with uninspired additions, and shocking deletions because they do not know what to keep or how to keep it. You can behold the growing ignorance in the meetings, conversations, conferences and spirits of these people. On-line discussions by rank-and-file members of these churches are filled with corrupt ignorance and vanity. Voluntarily they "know nothing" about the mysteries of God. This erosion of knowledge has grown year-by-year until now their meetings and conferences are astonishingly superficial and banal. I do not rejoice in this, but mourn it. It does not need to continue. They can repent and return. Nothing would please me more than to see the Community of Christ and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints decide to change their downward course. Like everyone else who is lost in darkness and foolishness, I invite them to repent and return.

The gospel is vast, and only the beginning, introductory part of the restoration was established through Joseph Smith. There is still a great deal left to recover. The task is daunting. Unto what can I liken it to help you see it clearly:

²¹ *JSP Documents Vol. 7*, p. 412; also *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 1840, p. 178.

²² NC Alma 9:3.

I stand beside a great ocean and I cannot convey it to you. I am but a man and all I have is a cup with which to show you. If I labor all my life using my cup I can never convey the ocean to you. Using the limited talent and means I have, with only a cup at a time, I can never convey enough to allow you to comprehend the ocean's sheer size. My effort mocks the great ocean because my measure is too modest, comparatively microscopic.

Using a cup, how can I ever portray the depth and pressure of the ocean? How can you ever discover its vast range of temperature in my small cup? How will you understand the relation between temperature and current, or the great power of the ocean's current? How shall I explain the effect of the moon on the ocean's tides when I have only a cup to declare it to you? How will the great diversity of both plant and animal life living in the ocean ever be understood when I have only a cup to show you? In the top 600 feet of the ocean lives 90% of known oceanic animal life, but the ocean is over 36,000 feet deep. Mount Everest rises 29,000 feet, and the ocean plunges down more than 7,000 feet beyond Everest's height. If 90% of the animal life we know lives in less than the top 2% of the ocean, how much life is there in the oceans we know nothing about. Life we have not even a hint exists may thrive in abundance in depths completely hidden from our knowledge.

The grandeur of Christ's gospel makes my capacity to declare it pitiful. I confess my inability, and I fear I can never do enough to help this generation to awaken and arise.

If I can help you grasp even a little of it, then let me point you to God who can do the rest. Men cannot utter what you need to learn. I am not capable, and it is not lawful.

[G]reat and marvelous are the works of the Lord, and the mysteries of his Kingdom which he showed unto us, which surpasses all understanding, in glory, and in might, and in dominion, which he commanded us we should not write while we were yet in the Spirit, and are not lawful for men to utter, neither is man capable to make them known, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows on those who love him and purify themselves before him, to whom he grants the privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves that through the power and manifestation of the Spirit, while in the flesh, they may be able to bear his presence in the world of glory.²³

You can know. God can show it to you. I testify that has and does happen.

But if God deigns to show you some of His great mysteries, never think that excuses you from the labor still left undone. Rejoice in your knowledge, but do not forsake God's work.

There have been some people who have been pointed to the greatness of God's work and have been so captivated by the wonder of the ocean's shoreline that they have gone astray. They have wandered off into their own exploration, thinking they have found something greater in a starfish than what has been shown to them in my cup. They have failed to continue because they think themselves independently enlightened and self-sufficient. One of the immediate casualties of their arrogance is their loss of any part in Zion. Zion will be

²³ T&C 69:29.

interdependent, cooperative and community-based. Zion will not consist of solitary spiritual sojourners wandering the vast intertidal zones of an almost infinite shoreline. No matter how much they may discover along that journey, they will not grasp the ocean's depth they could find in Zion.

There are many paradoxes in the gospel. Very often we must accept two truths that seem opposed to one another. The gospel is more art or music than math or science. But some kinds of art require math and science to engineer its creation. The scientist and artist may believe their skills conflict, but the gospel includes all truth and therefore unites both.

You will find paradoxes (meaning apparent contradictions). Welcome them. Often ocean life depends on the pressure of the great deep to exist. Pressure more than a thousand times our atmosphere at sea level exists in the ocean depths, and yet there is life there. That life exists with 15,750 pounds of pressure on each square inch, and is utterly dependent on the physical law that you cannot compress a liquid. Things that live there would explode if suddenly brought here, and if you were taken there suddenly, you would be crushed. The gospel is an ocean, and includes both.

We live with conflicts, paradoxes and opposing opinions. We must be at peace with all these. There is a poem in the Book of Job I rather like. This is taken from a modern version:

Have you given the horse strength?
Have you clothed his neck with thunder?
Can you frighten him like a locust?
His majestic snorting strikes terror.
He paws in the valley, and rejoices in his strength;
He gallops into the clash of arms.
He mocks at fear, and is not frightened;
Nor does he turn back from the sword.
The quiver rattles against him,
The glittering spear and javelin.
He devours the distance with fierceness and rage;
Nor does he come to a halt because the trumpet has sounded.
At the blast of the trumpet he says, 'Aha!
He smells the battle from afar,
The thunder of captains and shouting.'²⁴

The culmination of the ages will require us all to face the conflicts, the unease, anxiety, or what the Lord described as "the distress of nations, with perplexity."²⁵ The paradoxes and perplexities will require us all to charge ahead, like Job's horse to the battle. A final conflict may still be comparatively afar, but it is coming. It can be seen in the news, media, politics and society of our day. It creeps ever closer, and is even now only held at bay by the providence of heaven. This is a time to prepare. We are now in a season to reclaim and restore incomplete gospel understanding. These are precious moments and need to be well spent. We need to gallop into the clash of arms, and devour the remaining distance with the

²⁴ Job 39:19-25.

²⁵ NC Luke 12:17.

fierceness and rage of a committed heart determined to defy the idolatry and foolishness of our vain age. Stand fast in the truth. Defend yourself with knowledge. Knowledge of the truth comes from above and fortifies the soul with light and truth.

Social media makes minds weak, hearts faint, and fills a person with vanity and foolishness. It should not be embraced but relegated to the insignificance it deserves. The fabric of the electronic world consists of widespread opinions based on misinformation and lies. These are accepted as truth or proof. Those who are most engaged in social media are the most prone to believe in lies. Social media can cause emotional and mental deficiencies. Turn from it.

Political leaders do not want to solve problems, they want to preserve them so they can falsely promise to find an answer one day. They need problems to support their craft. But if an actual leader labors to solve a problem, it threatens the lying craft of the political class. The politicians of our day need persistent problems to motivate voters to give them authority and uphold them in their ambition. Do not be fooled. Our deliverance will never come from Washington or any other nation's capital.

Still, in almost every measurable way, the world is in a better state today than at any other time in history. Manufacturing can produce more useful things all throughout the world. We can grow more food, transport more material, produce more energy and create more wealth than any prior generation. But there is a great threat hanging over it all that can destroy every part of it – the lies and madness of deluded mankind. The contention, anger and hatred that dominate daily conversation have stirred up the world to anger. “For the kingdom of the Devil must shake, and they which belong to it must needs be stirred up unto repentance or the Devil will grasp them with his everlasting chains and they be stirred up to anger and perish. For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men and stir them up to anger against that which is good.”²⁶

Do not be angry with anyone, but certainly not with one another. Nearly all the violence described in the Book of Mormon came because of anger. Christ condemned this. “Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger one against another, but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.”²⁷

There will be no deliverance by any government, church or institution operated by men. The pitiful arm of man is nothing compared with the arm of God. The Lord is the creator of this world, and He gave dominion over His creation to Adam. Adam still presides, and the original order set up in the beginning will return before Christ comes to take back His creation. His kingdom is coming. Accomplishing what needs to be done before His return will make us subjects to the Divine King.

Skills will be needed. Learn useful things to help preserve order and comfort. Agriculture, metallurgy, medicine, mechanics, construction, engineering, hydraulics, husbandry, and every practical skill will benefit God's kingdom. So will literature, music, art and humanities. Society needs to have fire to cook, and fire in our hearts to make life whole. Learn all the useful knowledge the world can offer, and remember that knowledge of God is more valuable than it all.

²⁶ NC 2 Ne. 12:4.

²⁷ NC 3 Ne. 5:8.

Apostle Paul is credited with being the Father of the Protestant Reformation. His words about “grace” were used to reconceive man’s salvation. Martin Luther saw in Paul’s words the possibility of salvation by grace, separate from institutional authority and control.

At a time when Jesus Christ had living officials administering rites of the gospel, Paul was able to wrestle from heaven a dispensation. Using that dispensation, Paul became a dispensation head who did more, worked harder, and labored more abundantly in ministering to Christ’s sheep and spreading the gospel than any other man we know of.

Paul was not jealous of the others who knew Christ and had been called by Him to the ministry. But there is some evidence of fear²⁸ and jealousy²⁹ towards Paul for his success in obtaining an independent dispensation of the gospel.

Paul explained his diligence in spreading the gospel:

[I]n labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft; of the Jews, five times received I forty save one; three times was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; three times I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep; journeyings often, perils of waters, perils of robbers, perils by countrymen, perils by the heathen, perils in the city, perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea, perils among false brethren; in weariness and labor, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; beside those things that are outside, that which comes upon me daily, the care of all the churches.³⁰

Despite the opposition Paul experienced among believers and non-believers alike, he remained of a cheery disposition, “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now, at the last, your care of me has flourished again wherein you were also anxious, but you lacked opportunity; not that I speak in respect of lack, for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.”³¹

It is this kind of contentment that should be seen among people today. When God’s people are stirred to anger with each other, then even God is against them. After the spot for a temple in Missouri was revealed, the people who went there polluted it by their jealousies and fighting. The unbelieving Missourians were used by God to expel them from the place they had hoped to build a temple for God. They were surprised the holy spot could be taken from them. God explained why:

Verily I say unto you, concerning your brethren who have been afflicted and persecuted and cast out from the land of their inheritances, I the Lord have suffered the affliction to come upon them wherewith they have been afflicted, in consequence of their transgressions, yet I will own them, and they shall be mine in that day when I shall come to make up my jewels.

²⁸ NC Acts 5:11: “And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join himself to the disciples, but they were all afraid of him and believed not that he was a disciple.”

²⁹ NC Gal. 1:6: “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed;”

³⁰ NC 2 Cor. 1:39.

³¹ NC Phil. 1:6.

Therefore, they must needs be chastened and tried even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son, for all those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified. Behold, I say unto you, There were jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires among them, therefore, by these things they polluted their inheritances. They were slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God, therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble. In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel, but in the day of their trouble, of necessity, they feel after me.³²

If the covenant with God is kept, then He will allow His house to be built. The covenant cannot be kept if there is jarring, contention, envy, strife, lustful and covetous desires. If we do the same as those who went before, we would pollute the ground again. I am thankful we do not yet have a place to pollute. It would be better to never gain a promised place for God's house than to take possession and pollute it.

The content Apostle Paul taught the believers of his day, "Let your consecrations be without covetousness, and be content with giving such things as you have; for he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you, so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."³³

Alma taught a lesson that we accepted by covenant as a statement of our faith:

And now my beloved brethren, I have said these things unto you that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God after which ye have been received. And now I would that ye should be humble and be submissive and gentle, easy to be entreated, full of patience and longsuffering, being temperate in all things, being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times, asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal, always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive.³⁴

The greatness of a soul is defined by how easily they are entreated to follow the truth. The greatest of those who have ever lived have been submissive and gentle souls. In a day when Satan accuses and rages in the hearts of men, it requires extraordinary will and steely determination to remain easily entreated by truth.

I have pondered how much more ought to have been accomplished during Joseph Smith's lifetime? Joseph was only able to accomplish a fraction of what needs to be restored. Joseph faced continuing troubles because of the ambition of the believers. Too many of the saints aspired to lead. They wanted control over others. It hindered the work. Joseph was not able to finish the restoration. Our hearts must turn to the fathers in heaven, and we cannot ignore that duty because of any other vain ambition here and now. We should be less

³² NC T&C 101:1-2.

³³ NC Heb. 1:58.

³⁴ NC Alma 5:6.

astonished by the earlier failure and far more astonished at how little we have learned from their failure.

In a letter written in July 1840 Joseph explained:

In order to conduct the affairs of the kingdom in righteousness it is all important, that the most perfect harmony kind feeling, good understanding and confidence should exist in the hearts of all the brethren. and that true Charity—love one towards one another, should characterize all their proceedings. If there are any uncharitable feelings, any lack of confidence, then pride and arrogancy and envy will soon be manifested and confusion must inevitably prevail...³⁵

In that same letter Joseph said he wished the people would progress, but did not see that possible until a different spirit led them:

It would be gratifying to my mind to see the saints in Kirtland flourish, but think the time has not yet come and I assure you it never will until a different order of things be established and a different spirit be manifested.³⁶

It is in consequence of aspiring men that Kirtland has been forsaken.³⁷

After nearly a half-year of imprisonment, Joseph described the importance of a calm mind in order to hear the still small voice of God. His mind was afire with all the distractions of being in prison, and his family and friends expelled from Missouri at gunpoint. Friends had been killed. Church members had betrayed him. God spoke to Joseph when he freed his mind of these concerns and quietly pondered, opening himself up to inspiration.

Learn from these words Joseph wrote while in Liberty Jail about how to set aside all that distracts us to hear God's voice:

We received some letters last evening: one from Emma, one from Don C[arlos] Smith, and one from bishop Partridge, all breathing a kind and consoling spirit. We were much gratified with their contents. We had been a long time without information, and when we read those letters, they were to our souls as the gentle air is refreshing. But our joy was mingled with grief because of the suffering of the poor and much injured saints, and we need not say to you that the floodgates of our hearts were hoisted, and our eyes were a fountain of tears. But those who have not been enclosed in the walls of a prison without cause or provocation can have but a little idea how sweet the voice of a friend is. One token of friendship from any source whatever awakens and calls into action every sympathetic feeling. It brings up in an instant everything that is passed. It seizes the present with a vivacity of lightning. It grasps after the future with the fierceness of a tiger. It retrogrades from one thing to another, until finally all enmity, malice, and hatred, and past differences, misunderstandings, and mismanagements, lie slain victims at the feet of hope. And when the heart is sufficiently contrite,

³⁵ *JSP Documents Vol. 7*, p. 362, as in original.

³⁶ *Id.* p. 363.

³⁷ *Id.* p. 364.

then the Voice of inspiration steals along and whispers, My son, peace be unto your soul, your adversity and your afflictions shall be but a small moment, and then, if you endure it well, God shall exalt you on high[.]³⁸

This world is a place of trial and testing. Before creation it was planned that when we came here we would be “proven” by what we experience.³⁹ That happens now. Prove yourself by listening to God, hearing His voice, and obeying. Sometimes we are like Alma and want to do greater things to help God’s work,⁴⁰ but the greatest work of all is to respond to God’s voice and prove you are willing to listen and obey Him.

I want to show you the ocean of truth that spreads to depths, distances and directions that are infinite. But I must be content to use only a cup to give what little a man can measure and convey. Only God can show it because it is too great, too far above man’s poor ability. It is not lawful for man, neither is man capable to make it known, for it is only to be seen and understood by those who purify themselves before God; to whom He grants this privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves, while in the flesh.

It was a year ago that a renewed covenant was given to all willing to accept it by God. New covenant people sprang into existence when a few accepted that gift. Until that moment, there were only lost and scattered remnants who, although the object of God’s earlier covenants, lived in ignorance of God’s renewed labor in His vineyard. Now, in addition to other remnants, there is a new covenant remnant aware of God’s renewed labor. A remnant who has been asked to labor alongside the Master of the Vineyard as He sends His final invitation to come to His wedding feast. Christ spoke of this very thing when He taught the Nephites. He foretold that the barren gentiles would eventually produce more children for His Kingdom than the remnants on this land and at Jerusalem. Christ said:

And then shall that which is written come to pass: Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child, for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. Enlarge the place of thy tent and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes, for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left, and thy seed shall inherit the gentiles and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. Fear not for thou shalt not be ashamed, neither be thou confounded for thou shalt not be put to shame, for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy maker, thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: the God of the whole earth shall he be called.⁴¹

We can see a new and different meaning in Christ’s Book of Mormon prophecy to the Nephites. Before Christ’s words seemed to foretell that the lost and scattered remnants

³⁸ T&C 138:11.

³⁹ “And we will prove them herewith to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.” (T&C 145: Book of Abraham 6:2.)

⁴⁰ “But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me.” (Alma 15:12.)

⁴¹ NC 3 Ne. 10:2.

would build the Lord's House and the New Jerusalem, now it appears that there are covenant receiving gentiles who are included. Gentiles who repent and hearken to Christ's words, and do not harden their hearts will be brought into covenant as His people. Christ mentions three distinct bodies. First, those who have accepted the covenant and are numbered among the remnant of Jacob to whom Christ gave this land for their inheritance. Second, the lost descendants of the remnant of Jacob on this land who will repent and return. Third, as many from the House of Israel who will repent and return. These three will build a city that shall be called the New Jerusalem. All three of those will come to know God in gathering and laboring to build the New Jerusalem. Then they will go out to assist all of God's people in their lost and forgotten state to be awakened to the work of God, and gathered as if one body of believers. Then all who have any of the blood of Abraham, who are scattered upon all the face of the land, will come to be taught in the New Jerusalem. There the Power of Heaven will come down to be among them, the angels and Enoch with his ten thousands will come down, the Ancient of Days or Adam our first father, and Christ also will be in the midst of His people.⁴²

The spirit of God is withdrawing from the world. Men are increasingly angry without good cause. The hearts of men are waxing cold. The scriptures describe events now underway, and call it the end of the times of the gentiles. This process of the spirit withdrawing will end on this continent, as it did with two prior civilizations, in fratricidal and genocidal warfare. For the rest of the world, it will be as in the days of Noah in which, as the light of Christ or spirit of truth is eclipsed, men's cold hearts will result in a constant scene of violence and bloodshed. The wicked will destroy the wicked. The covenant established a year ago, if it is kept, will prevent the loss of light and warmth of heart as the spirit now steadily recedes from the world. Be charitable and patient and labor to reach others. Even if they should judge you harshly because of their traditions, you should nevertheless be kind to them. They are going to grow to fear you, but that's only part of how darkness responds to light. Give them no reason to fear you. The time will come for us to gather, but between now and then, be leaven. Preserve the world. Be salt. Preserve the world, even if it hates you. The soul of every person is equally precious to God as is yours. If your kindness and example could awaken another soul, you will rejoice with the angels over them.

⁴² Compare NC 3 Ne. 10:1: "But if they will repent and hearken unto my words and harden not their hearts, I will establish my church among them and they shall come in unto the covenant and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance. And they shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city which shall be called the New Jerusalem. And then shall they assist my people that they may be gathered in, who are scattered upon all the face of the land, in unto the New Jerusalem. And then shall the power of Heaven come down among them and I also will be in the midst. And then shall the work of the Father commence at that day, even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people. Verily, I say unto you, At that day shall the work of the Father commence among all the dispersed of my people, yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem. Yea, the work shall commence among all the dispersed of my people with the Father to prepare the way whereby they may come unto me, that they may call on the Father in my name. Yea, and then shall the work commence with the Father among all nations, in preparing the way whereby his people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance. And they shall go out from all nations and they shall not go out in haste nor go by flight, for I will go before them, saith the Father, and I will be their rearward."

There is a need “to set in order the House of God,”⁴³ which can only be accomplished through a temple where that work can be performed. The temple is not the “House of God” needing to be set in order. But a temple is required to accomplish the work for God’s House, or family, to be set in order. As once described by God: “Organize yourselves, prepare every needful thing, and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a House of God, that your incomings may be in the name of the Lord, that your outgoings may be in the name of the Lord, that all your salutations may be in the name of the Lord with uplifted hands unto the Most High.”⁴⁴

Let me end with a few concluding words of wise counsel:

First, just because you young folks have thought about something, that does not necessarily mean you know enough to form a reasonable opinion about it. Likewise, holding an opinion does not mean you know the truth yet. Always be open to learning more and the possibility that more information may well change your thinking, change your opinion, and bring you closer to the truth.

Second, words only have the control over you that you allow them to have. Some people use coarse language because they do not know any better. Coarse language alone does not necessarily reveal the worth of the individual or the thought underlying the words. As Joseph Smith once said, “I love that man better who swears a stream as long as my arm. and administ(er)ing to the poor & dividi(n)g his substance. than the long smoothed faced hypo(c)rites.”⁴⁵ Many of my childhood friends and most of their fathers could conjugate obscenities into nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions. That reflected little on their inner character. An afternoon I spent with my father and a few of his friends, all of whom were veterans of World War II, reminded me that heroic deeds and selflessness for others matters a greater deal more than coarse language. That afternoon humbled me. I was a law student at the time, and thought myself better educated than all those men, my father included. A few hours in their company, however, brought the sober realization that they had done great deeds, laying their lives on the line, and through their valiance I had inherited privileges they secured. Do not give a handful of coarse words power they do not deserve.

God’s great power does not require an earthquake, a fire, or a whirlwind.⁴⁶ Sometimes God’s mighty power comes in a still small voice,⁴⁷ or in a dream warning the family to flee to safety.⁴⁸ God uses “small means” and “simple things” to accomplish His greatest influence.⁴⁹

⁴³ See T&C 83:4.

⁴⁴ T&C 86:29.

⁴⁵ *JSP Journals*, Vol. 3, p. 303, May 21, 1843, edited to correct spelling.

⁴⁶ OC 1 Kings 4:26.

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ NC 1 Ne. 1:5-6. The New Covenants edition illustrates this point remarkably clearly, as Nephi describes his family’s deliverance as the mighty “power of deliverance” followed by the description of his father’s dream warning them to flee Jerusalem. Through the eyes of faith, Nephi saw this for what it was. Sometimes we lack those eyes, and therefore never notice God’s mighty power.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., NC Alma 17:8; 1 Ne. 5:8.

If you will allow Him to guide you with small means He will save you from destruction here and in the hereafter.

Finally, virtue matters, morality matters and chastity matters. One of the greatest sources of joy and misery is our ability to produce children. The union of men and women inside a marriage, where children can be born to parents who want them, and are prepared to love and care for them, is how the power of procreation was intended to be enjoyed. Separate from that, it has produced a great deal of misery in this world. Be moral. Be chaste. Guard your virtue.

I teach these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.