

1916-April 6-Improvement Era 19:646-652, May, 1916.

The statement of President Joseph F. Smith in this remarkable message to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the opening session of General Conference would seem to serve as the theme or key to the remaining thirty months of his life. He said: "Sometimes the Lord expands our vision from this point of view and this side of the veil, so that we feel and seem to realize that we can look beyond the thin veil which separates us from that other sphere."

The manifestations related in this message plus those of three other documents recorded in that thirty-month period from April 6, 1916, to November 19, 1918, seem ample evidence that the veil between this life and the "other sphere" was indeed thin for President Smith during that period. The three other messages appearing later in the volume are: The Status of Children in the Resurrection, February, 1918; A Dream that was a Reality, April 7, 1918; and Vision of the Redemption of the Dead, October 3, 1918. It is doubtful if in any given period of like duration in the entire history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints so much detail as to the nature of the life after death has been given to any other prophet of this dispensation, as of record.

In the presence of the divine

By President Joseph F. Smith

(Thousands felt the Divine inspiration that accompanied the delivery of this remarkable sermon, uttered in the opening session of the annual conference, Thursday, April 6, 1916, the eighty-sixth anniversary of the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.)

I shall need the assistance of the Good Spirit, and of the good feeling and faith and sympathy of my brethren and sisters this morning in an endeavor to speak to you for a short time. I do not feel nor design to occupy very much of the time. I can not express my gratitude, with the language in my possession, which I feel this morning in being permitted, under the mercies of the Father of us all, to be present with you and behold the sight that I see in the assembled multitudes gathered here in the opening session of this conference, on the eighty-sixth anniversary of the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Those Who Have Gone Before Rejoice With Us

I feel sure that the Prophet Joseph Smith and his associates, who, under the guidance and inspiration of the Almighty, and by his power, began this latter-day work, would rejoice and do rejoice, if they are permitted to look down upon the scene that I behold in this tabernacle. And I believe they do have the privilege of looking down upon us, just as the all-seeing eye of God beholds every part of his handiwork. For I believe that those who have been chosen in this dispensation and in former dispensations, to lay the foundation of God's work in the midst of the children of men, for their salvation and exaltation, will not be deprived in the spirit world from looking down upon the results of their own labors,

efforts and mission assigned them by the wisdom and purpose of God to help to redeem and to reclaim the children of the Father from their sins.

The Eyes of the Prophets Guard the Kingdom of God

So, I feel quite confident that the eyes of Joseph the Prophet, and of the martyrs of this dispensation, and of Brigham and John and Wilford, and those faithful men who were associated with them in their ministry upon the earth, are carefully guarding the interests of the Kingdom of God in which they labored and for which they strove during their mortal lives. I believe they are as deeply interested in our welfare today, if not with greater capacity, with far more interest, behind the veil, than they were in the flesh. I believe they know more; I believe their minds have expanded beyond their comprehension in mortal life, and their interests are enlarged in the work of the Lord to which they gave their lives and their best service. Although some may feel and think that it is a little extreme to take this view, yet I believe that it is true; and I have a feeling in my heart that I stand in the presence not only of the Father and of the Son, but in the presence of those whom God commissioned, raised up, and inspired, to lay the foundations of the work in which we are engaged. Accompanying that sense or feeling, I am impressed with the thought that I would not this moment say or do one thing that would be taken as unwise or imprudent, or that would give offense to any of my former associates and co-laborers in the work of the Lord. I would not like to say one thing, nor express a thought, that would grieve the heart of Joseph, or of Brigham, or of John, or of Wilford, or Lorenzo, or any of their faithful associates in the ministry.

We Are in the Presence of Heavenly Beings

Sometimes the Lord expands our vision from this point of view and this side of the veil, so that we feel and seem to realize that we can look beyond the thin veil which separates us from that other sphere. If we can see, by the enlightening influence of the Spirit of God and through the words that have been spoken by the holy prophets of God, beyond the veil that separates us from the spirit world, surely those who have passed beyond, can see more clearly through the veil back here to us than it is possible for us to see to them from our sphere of action. I believe we move and have our being in the presence of heavenly messengers and of heavenly beings. We are not separate from them. We begin to realize, more and more fully, as we become acquainted with the principles of the gospel, as they have been revealed anew in this dispensation, that we are closely related to our kindred, to our ancestors, to our friends and associates and co-laborers who have preceded us into the spirit world. We can not forget them; we do not cease to love them; we always hold them in our hearts, in memory, and thus we are associated and united to them by ties that we can not break, that we can not dissolve or free ourselves from. If this is the case with us in our finite condition, surrounded by our mortal weaknesses, short-sightedness, lack of inspiration and wisdom, from time to time, how much more certain it is and reasonable and consistent to believe that those who have been faithful, who have gone beyond and are still engaged in the work for the salvation of the souls of men, the opening of the prison doors to them that are bound, and proclaiming liberty to the captives, can see us better than we can see them; that they know us better than we know

them. They have advanced; we are advancing; we are growing as they have grown; we are reaching the goal that they have attained unto; and therefore, I claim that we live in their presence, they see us, they are solicitous for our welfare, they love us now more than ever. For now they see the dangers that beset us; they can comprehend, better than ever before, the weaknesses that are liable to mislead us into dark and forbidden paths. They see the temptations and the evils that beset us in life and the proneness of mortal beings to yield to temptation and to wrong doing; hence their solicitude for us, and their love for us, and their desire for our well being, must be greater than that which we feel for ourselves.

A Glorious Vision

I thank God for the feeling that I possess and enjoy, and for the realization that I have, that I stand not only in the presence of Almighty God, my Maker and Father, but in the presence of his Only Begotten Son in the flesh, the Savior of the world; and I stand in the presence of Peter and James (and perhaps the eyes of John are also upon us and we know it not); and that I stand also in the presence of Joseph and Hyrum and Brigham and John, and Wilford, and Lorenzo, and those who have been valiant in the testimony of Jesus Christ and faithful to their mission in the world, who have gone before. When I go, I want to have the privilege of meeting them with the consciousness that I have followed their example, that I have carried out the mission in which they were engaged as they would have it carried out; that I have been as faithful in the discharge of duty, committed to me and required at my hand, as they were faithful in their time; and that when I meet them, I shall meet them as I met them here, in love, in harmony, in unison and in perfect confidence that I have done my duty as they have done theirs. I hope you will forgive me for my emotion. You would have peculiar emotions, would you not? if you felt that you stood in the presence of your Father, in the very presence of Almighty God, in the very presence of the Son of God and of holy angels? You would feel rather emotional, rather sensitive. I feel it to the very depths of my soul this moment. So I hope you will forgive me, if I exhibit some of my real feelings, I am only a child, I am only learning, and I hope I shall not be ever learning and never come to a knowledge of the truth. I sincerely hope that as I learn, little by little, line upon line and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, day by day, and month by month, and year by year, that there will come a time when I shall have learned, indeed, the truth and shall know it as God knows it and be saved and exalted in his presence.

To Know God and Jesus Christ Is Life Eternal

Now, my mission, my duty, from the days of my childhood, has been to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God unto salvation unto all who will receive and obey it. It is my duty to proclaim to my brethren, to the household of faith, as well as to the world, when opportunity presents, that I believe in the living God, the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who begot his Son, his Only Begotten in the flesh, and that Son grew from his birth unto his manhood, and developed into the very image and likeness of his Father, insomuch that he declared on one occasion that "he that hath seen me, hath seen the Father."

I do not believe in the doctrines held by some that God is only a spirit, and that he is of such a nature that he fills the immensity of space, and is everywhere present in person or without person—for I can not conceive it possible that God could be a person if he filled the immensity of space and was everywhere present at the same time. It is a physical, a theological inconsistency and unreasonable to imagine that even God the Eternal Father would be in two places, as an individual, at the same moment. It is impossible. But his power extends throughout the immensity of space. His power extends to all his creations, and his knowledge comprehends them all. He governs them all, and he knows all. It is a scriptural truth, that this is life eternal to know the only true and living God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. I believe that the Latter-day Saints, through the teachings of the scriptures and through the revelations that have come to them by the voice of the Prophet Joseph Smith, are able to learn the true and living God and know him and also his Son whom he has sent into the world, whom to know is life eternal. Not simply the knowledge of it; but, having that knowledge, we are inclined and determined to observe his precepts, obey his laws, be submissive to his requirements, in every particular, and accept every ordinance of the house of God and of the gospel of Jesus Christ that has been devised by the will of the Father for the qualification of his children in the earth to return unto his presence. And he that knoweth God and Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal, will verify that knowledge by ample, continuous, and faithful obedience to every requirement that God makes of his children, and therein consists the salvation and the gift of eternal life. The devil knows the Father much better than we. Lucifer, the son of the morning, knows Jesus Christ, the Son of God, much better than we, but in him it is not and will not redound to eternal life; for, knowing, he yet rebels; knowing, he yet is disobedient; he will not receive the truth; he will not abide in the truth; hence, he is Perdition, and there is no salvation for him. The same doctrine applies to me and to you and to all the sons and daughters of God who have judgment and knowledge, are able to reason between cause and effect, determine the right from the wrong, the good from the evil, and who are capable of seeing the light and distinguishing it from the darkness.

The Gospel Our Schoolmaster

Then this is the gospel of Jesus Christ, to know the only true and living God and his Son whom he has sent into the world, which knowledge comes through obedience to all his commandments, faith, repentance of sin, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands by divine authority, and not by the will of man. This, then, is the gospel of Jesus Christ which is the power of God unto salvation: obedience to the truth, submission to the order that God has established in his house, for the house of God is a house of order and not a house of confusion. God has set in his Church apostles and prophets and evangelists, and pastors and teachers, whose duty it is to administer to the people, to teach, instruct, expound, exhort, admonish and lead in the path of righteousness. The people who are associated in this organization must hearken to the voice of him who has divine authority to guide and direct and counsel in the midst of Israel. All these are necessary in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and many other things, too many for me to mention here, are necessary, including the ordinances of the house of God, revealed in greater plainness in this dispensation than perhaps in any

former dispensation since the world was formed. All these ordinances are essential in their place and in their time, and none of us are big enough, or good enough, or possess sufficient independence in ourselves to ignore these things that God has revealed and required of us. No man is so big, so great, or knows so much, that he is independent of God. We are here on his earth, we breathe his air, we behold his sunlight. We eat his food, and we wear his clothing. He has provided all the elements by which we are clothed and fed, and live and move and have our being, in the world.

The Priesthood Restored

We are not independent of God, not for one moment. Not only do we believe in the Father and in the Son, and in their words, counsel and divine authority, which they brought and gave to men in the flesh, but we believe, also, in the divinity of the mission of Joseph the Prophet. We accept him as the one authorized, empowered, clothed with wisdom and knowledge in our day and time, to lay the foundations of the Church of Jesus Christ, and to restore the fullness of the gospel of salvation to the world; to revive and renew in the hearts of the children of men the doctrines of Christ, the ordinances of his gospel which he taught, which he administered, and which he authorized his disciples to administer to all that would repent and believe in the name of the Father and of the Son.

We believe that God has restored the divine priesthood, which holds the keys of ministration of the ordinances of life, to the children of men. Without that divine priesthood no man could receive or would receive a remission of sins by being buried in the water. It has to be by divine authority, and without that divine authority our works would not be acceptable to the Lord, for he will not accept at the hands of the children of men that which he has not authorized them to do, which he has not qualified them to do, and called and appointed them to do; but when God calls men, and ordains, and appoints, and gives them authority to administer in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, what they do can not fail to be sanctioned and approved by the Author and giver of the authority. When we receive the priesthood of God, and we do according to his word, then is he bound, but otherwise there is no promise.

The Twelve Are Eye and Ear Witnesses of Christ

Now I can't tell you all that I would like to. Time will not permit, and there are others to speak. All these, your brethren, who are called to the apostleship, and to minister in the midst of the house of Israel, are endowed, or ought to be endowed, richly with the spirit of their calling. For instance, these twelve disciples of Christ are supposed to be eye and ear witnesses of the divine mission of Jesus Christ. It is not permissible for them to say, I believe, simply; I have accepted it, simply because I believe it. Read the revelation. The Lord informs us they must know, they must get the knowledge for themselves, it must be with them as if they had seen with their eyes and heard with their ears, and they know the truth. That is their mission, to testify of Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen from the dead and clothed now with almighty power at the right hand of God, the Savior of the world. That is their mission, and their duty; and that is the doctrine and the truth, that is their duty to preach to the world, and see that it is preached to the world. Where they can

not go themselves, they are to have the help of others called to their assistance. The seventies first, also the elders and the high priests. Those who hold the Melchizedek priesthood, not otherwise appointed, are under their direction to preach the gospel to the world and to declare the truth-that Jesus is the Christ, and that Joseph is a prophet of God and was authorized and qualified to lay the foundation of the Kingdom of God and when I say Kingdom of God I mean what I say. Christ is the King-not man. No man is king of the Kingdom of God; God is the King of it, and we acknowledge him and him only as Sovereign of his Kingdom.

Qualifications Requisite for Latter-day Saints

Now we all need patience, forbearance, forgiveness, humility, charity, love unfeigned, devotion to the truth, abhorrence of sin, wickedness, and rebellion and disobedience to the requirements of the gospel. These are the qualifications requisite to Latter-day Saints, and to becoming Latter-day Saints, members in good standing in the Church of Jesus Christ, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. No member in good standing in the Church will be drunken, riotous, profane, or will take advantage of his brother or his neighbor, or will violate the principles of virtue, honor, and righteousness. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in good standing will never be chargeable with such offenses as these, because they will avoid these evils and they will live above them. Then we have a mission in the world, each man, each woman, each child, who has grown to understanding or to the years of accountability-all ought to be examples to the world, ought not only to be qualified to preach the truth, to bear testimony of the truth, but they ought to live so that the very life they live, the very words they speak, their every action in life, will be sermons to the unwary and to the ignorant, teaching them goodness, purity, uprightness, faith in God and love for the human family.

God bless you and all the household of faith, and help us to be true and faithful to the end, realizing that the battle is not to the strong, nor the race to the swift, but to him that endures to the end. Amen.

(James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-75), 5: 4.)