

Come Follow Me Insights (Joseph Smith History 1:1-26, Doctrine & Covenants 1-26)

Welcome to Book of Mormon Central's Come Follow Me Insights. Today, Joseph Smith History chapter 1 verses 1 through 26.

This is one of the most significant events in the history of the world that we're going to cover today. The First Vision is going to change everything, not just for members of the Church moving forward, but for the whole world. It's this opening up this glorious dispensation of the gospel called the dispensation of the fullness of times in these, the latter days.

Before we jump into the story here in Joseph Smith History, let's set the stage. Joseph Smith gave four different accounts on different occasions of what happened to him on that early spring morning in that grove that we now call sacred. So, to quickly overview these, you can find great detail on each one of these accounts that we're not going to cover in this video. The Church has produced a beautiful topic in their topics essays that you can go in and read each one of these and see the similarities and where he points out different elements.

Just in quick overview format, the 1832 account, the first one, is the only one written by Joseph Smith himself in his journal. So, it's handwritten by Joseph, and he's going to focus on the feeling of seeking forgiveness. He's wanting salvation, and he emphasizes that in here. And in the 1832 account, he mentions the Lord appeared to him in that account. And some detractors have looked at that and said, oh. Well then, he's making things up later on when he mentions Father and Son. We'll talk about that in a minute.

The 1835 account was given to a man by the name of Robert Matthews, who was a visitor in Kirtland, Ohio, and Warren Parrish recorded Joseph's telling of his experience into Joseph's journal. So, this is the Warren Parrish recording into Joseph's journal, and in this one, he's going to introduce the two characters where one came first and then introduced another one second. He'll talk about seeing angels as part of the vision as well.

The 1838 account is the one that we are going to be covering today, because it's the one that is printed in our Pearl of Great Price. It was originally published in the Times and Seasons, the paper of the Church at the time. That's the one that most of us are all familiar with.

The 1842 account comes from the Wentworth letter. So, Joseph wrote this letter to the editor of the Chicago Democrat, a publication in Chicago at the time who had asked him questions about the Church. It's in that letter that you also get the Articles of Faith.

Now, there were five additional second-hand accounts that we have of the First Vision. So, we have a total of nine: four of them from Joseph, recorded by others in three of the cases; and then five others: Orson Pratt, Orson Hyde, Levi Richards, David Nye White, and Alexander Neibaur, and they all focus on slightly different things.

Now Taylor, how would you respond to somebody who says, wait a minute! Joseph Smith gave four different accounts and he doesn't say the exact same thing all four times? What's wrong with that? How would you respond?

That's a fair question. I think about experiences I've had in my life, really meaningful experiences. And I think I might tell that story to my kids in one way, to my wife in another, and actually, to this audience here, it might come out a little bit differently, to my parents differently, to college classes, or if I write it to a newspaper. And each of those are actually true accounts, but each time, I'm actually trying to convey and teach in a way that makes sense to the audience, and also may emphasize something that I care deeply about that I'm drawing from that memory of that experience.

Here's another question to throw in. Have you ever experienced anything in your life where, at the time, it was a big, powerful experience, but it was only later, when looking back on it, that you were able to actually connect some of the dots that you hadn't connected in the moment; where you're saying, wait a minute. Maybe God was trying to teach me this and this and this as part of that experience there.

Yeah, it's absolutely insightful. We all have had experiences like that, where we feel an impression, we make a decision, something happens in our lives, and we say, this is what it means. And then we get more experience, and we reflect further on that experience, the original experience, and say, there are actually new insights here that I didn't see. In fact, in my own life, I've actually seen God shaping my life, and I've found myself amazed that what I thought I understood, I did not fully have the entire picture until I had reflected more fully. But again, I love that we have all these versions because it's like when I go to testimony meeting at church. Okay, so I've been in my ward now for more than a decade, and my friends in my neighborhood, I often hear from the same people. And every time they share their testimony of the gospel, sometimes it's a little different. I don't suddenly think that my friends are lying to me. I feel this deep joy of, I'm gaining new insights about what matters to them. And what I love about all these different versions is that it gives us new insight about what Joseph experienced in the grove, and I wish we had twenty versions.

I know. You know what this reminds me of, is there are other things like this in the scriptures. For instance, you have Jesus, the life of Christ. But what do we get in the New Testament? Matthew's view, Mark's view, Luke's view, and John's view. It takes his life and it gives you four different angles from four different people who have four different audiences that they're trying to convince that Jesus is the Christ, and now we get the benefit of having all four of them. It makes the Savior's life and ministry and those events become more three-dimensional for us. It becomes more real. You can fill in more blanks.

Let's also consider Alma, where he has this transformative experience, and then he actually repeats it several different times in terms of his telling. And there are some interesting, distinct differences that round out and give us new insights about what that experience was when he learned that his Savior would save him.

Beautiful. Same thing with Saul or Paul in the New Testament. We get multiple tellings of that experience, and they're not all the same; there's some variation. There are definite similarities, but there is some richness that comes in studying all of those accounts.

Now, what does this mean for us? Brothers and sisters, you and I happen to live in an age of the world that demands instantaneous solutions and answers. We live in a world that hates pain, that dislikes any discomfort and wants to avoid that at all costs. And yet, if you read the scriptures, and all of the stories of these people in the past, it looks to me that God is not up in his heavens saying, what can I do to make their life as pain-free and easy as possible? In fact, we see contrasts between what God does with us, versus what Satan's temptations do with us, and we're going to see that contrast coming through this story. Satan is all about me, here, now. What do I want right now? How can I gratify either my pride, or my ambition, or my appetite, my desire, my passion, right now, with no thought of what it's going to cost me long term? Whereas, you're going to find, as we go through this story, that God is not taking faith off of the table for any one of us.

We're going to cover some things here, and we're going to tell Joseph's story, or we're going to watch as Joseph tells his story, and go with him through these events. But at the end of the day, we don't have video footage of these events. We don't have audio recordings of these events. There's no quote unquote "proof" of anything we're going to read, which means it all comes back to us having faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ, and trusting in what is revealed through his chosen Prophet. You see, here's the grand irony: it was God who chose a farm boy, a quite poor farm boy, to become the prophet, to open the dispensation of the fullness of times. It wasn't us who chose him. It was God who chose him, and so it's to God that we must go in order to find the answers. And at the end of the day, we can go to the internet and we can look at what all of the world's quote unquote "experts" say, or don't say, about Joseph, or about the events that we're going to cover today, but at the end of the day, you and I are responsible for finding truth. And truth is not a democratically decided thing, when it comes to stuff like this. It's going to either be revealed, or not. We're going to have faith in God, or not. But at the end of the day, we're responsible for it, for seeking that truth.

One of the parts of my mission I loved the most is the opportunity to share a witness of the story that we've been talking about: Joseph Smith encountering God the Father and Jesus Christ. I served in Chile Viña Del Mar, taught a lot of lessons. Many of them were the first discussion, as they were known back then. And I just loved getting to that point where we would say that Joseph Smith saw Jesus and God the Father. We'd always pause as we would feel the Spirit. We wanted to make sure that people we were talking with would also have an opportunity, a time to reflect and feel that Spirit. So, I've lost count of how many times I've felt the Spirit having that opportunity to share a testimony of Joseph Smith and the First Vision.

What's interesting, is years later, I had chosen to go to graduate school to study the Bible and world religions, and I'd been invited to teach a world religion class at a secular university. And here I was, teaching on all the religions of the world, all the major religions: Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism, Daoism, Hinduism and various branches of Christianity, Islam. Well, there was a section on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and in the readings, in the text book, was this portion of Joseph Smith's story. And I remember being in this class with a bunch of students studying world religions, none of them trying to be converted to any religion, they

were just intellectually curious. And I'm reading this story to them, just like I'd read lots of other stories of other religious figures throughout human history. And I shared this story, and I found myself shocked that, as I was reading this story to them in this class, I felt the Spirit burning as bright, and pure, and as clean, as I had ever felt on my mission. Now again, it wasn't my intention to try to convert the students. I just thought, wow! It's true. It's true wherever I go, whether I'm teaching at a secular university, or teaching people who are truly interested in having their lives turned over to God, or just my own private life. The witness that Joseph Smith declared to us is true.

Now, watch. Look how he opens his account in 1838. "Owing to the many reports which have been put in circulation by evil-disposed and designing persons, in relation to the rise and progress of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, all of which have been designed by the authors thereof to militate against its character as a Church and its progress in the world – I have been induced to write this history, to disabuse the public mind, and put all inquirers after truth in possession of the facts, as they have transpired, in relation both to myself and the Church, so far as I have such facts in my possession" (JSH 1:1).

What you're going to see as we proceed forward is a simple, boots-on-the-ground kind of a telling of, these are the facts, this is what's happened, and the reason I'm telling it this simply is because of all these false reports that are circulating out, there trying to discredit everything that's happened with the rise of the Church, eight years into its existence.

And so, he begins in verse 3 with a quick overview of his life: that he was born in 1805, on the 23rd day of December, Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont (JSH 1:3). He gives you some detail about his family, and then he doesn't give you all the details of how that family relocated from Vermont over to upstate New York, into the Palmyra region, which is loaded with all kinds of miraculous events, some of which are tragic for this family: three years of successive crop failures.

So, you'll notice, once the family has relocated from Vermont to upstate New York into Palmyra, he picks up the story in verse 5, telling us about the religious fervor that's exciting the area. Notice he says, there was "an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of the country" (JSH 1:5). And down at the bottom he tells us that it had begun with the Methodists, but then it was soon also with the Presbyterians, "and some for the Baptists" (JSH 1:5). And everybody's saying "Lo, here!" "Lo, there!" and they're all contending.

Now, as you turn over to verse 6, he says: "For, notwithstanding the great love which the converts to these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion, and the great zeal manifested by the respective clergy, who were active in getting up and promoting this extraordinary scene of religious feeling, in order to have everybody converted, as they were pleased to call it," (JSH 1:6). Notice, down at the bottom, the "good feelings of both the priests and the converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued – priest contending against priest, and convert against convert; so that all their good

feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words and contest about opinions" (JSH 1:6). So as a result of this excitement, this religious fervor that had built up, you'll notice in verse 7, he tells us that four members of his family had joined the Presbyterian faith, but Joseph informs us that he was more leaning toward the Methodist faith at that time.

Now verse 8: "During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness;" (JSH 1:8). Now notice, brothers and sisters, how easy it would have been for the Lord to take this young prophet, as he's going to the different camp meetings that are occurring in these revivals and trying to get people to join the cause, how easy it would have been for the Lord to very instantaneously just given an answer to the young prophet so that he didn't have to work through the process of going to camp meeting after camp meeting, to talk to preacher after preacher after preacher, to discuss with his mom, and his dad, and his siblings, and to read the scriptures and to ponder over them, it would have been so easy for him to instantaneously answer Joseph's question, which is, where do I go? Where do I go to find salvation?

So, notice the wording here: "...serious reflection," in verse 8, "great uneasiness." His feelings "were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties," but he kept attending their meetings (JSH 1:8). Now notice the next phrase: "In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect," (JSH 1:8). You're going to notice this idea that Joseph keeps giving us, "in the process of time." Brothers and sisters, we live in mortality which is intended to be a trial of faith whereas, like I said before, our society demands instantaneous answers. We don't like not knowing. We want resolve right now. We don't want drawn out questions and pains or feeling forsaken from Heaven. We want everything instantaneously given to us, but notice this, verse 9: "My mind at times was greatly excited, the cry and tumult were so great and incessant. The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and Methodists, and used all the powers of both reason and sophistry to prove their errors," (JSH 1:9).

Now you get down to verse 10: "In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it? While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse," (JSH 1:10-11). So, you'll notice he's working through this long process of trying to find answers doing different things: going to camp meetings, having conversations, and he doesn't know the answer still, and somehow God's okay with that. Somehow, God's okay with us working through this long process of time to seek things that really matter or, quite frankly, to build relationships that are meant to last.

So, it's in James chapter 1 verse 5 that Joseph comes across this passage. Now really quickly, James, just for some quick context from a New Testament perspective, many biblical scholars would tell us that James is the half-brother of Jesus. He's writing a general epistle, and it's called the Epistle of James. Ironically, many of the people in the Protestant Reformation would look at the Epistle of James and not appreciate it. In fact, Martin Luther, once considered the father of

the reformation, he called, on one occasion, the Epistle of James an epistle of straw. He said you can eat it all day and get no nourishment out of it. It's not scripture. He didn't like the Epistle of James at all. Probably because, well, most definitely because of James' focus on faith without works is dead, and for Martin Luther, he didn't want any works associated with salvation. He wanted it to be all about grace. So, it's interesting that a book that was considered non-scriptural actually contains one verse that is going to change the whole future of the world. It's James 1 verse 5 to 6.

I've always just thought it just beautifully meaningful that it's the half-brother of Jesus that pens the words that helped to launch the restoration. Let's spend a little bit of time dwelling on this verse. I'm going to read it as Joseph Smith would have known it, and then I'm going to share a couple of alternate translations, and spend a few minutes looking at some of the words that are used that help to invite all of us to be inspired like Joseph Smith was, to trust that God will give us what we need.

Here's what Joseph Smith read: "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" (James 1:5). I think we all pretty much understand that verse. It's encouraging us to ask God for answers. So, let's take a look at a couple of words. The first one's *liberally*, or *liberal*, or *liberty*. All have to do with *free* or *freedom* and an alternate translation, the New International Version reads like this: "If any of you lack wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (NIV James 1:5). I love also this word *wisdom*, that God himself is the source of all wisdom. In fact, the Epistle of James is often called a piece of *wisdom literature* because it's so much focused on the things that we can do to experience the wisdom of God and it begins right here in verse 5, saying spend time talking to God. Ask him. How many of us, when we are seeking wisdom, go right here? I don't think God has a problem if we want to go look things up on the internet, but we should make sure that we are spending key time talking to God who is the source of all truth and all knowledge.

And we've talked in the past that the word *wisdom* is also related to other words in our language that we all can appreciate. So, think about how the wisdom that Joseph Smith sought led to a vision which gave him evidence for the truths that he was seeking and all these words actually come from the same root word.

Now let's just spend just a moment here on the word *upbraideth*. This is a word that we don't very much use today in English. But let me just share a couple of verses from the New Testament that use the same underlying Greek word to kind of help us to see what is going on here. Let's turn to Matthew 5 verse 11: Jesus says, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." So back there in the Sermon on the Mount the word *revile* is the same Greek word that we find in James 1:5 for *upbraideth*. How about at the cross, Matthew 27:44, "The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." Right? So, they're kind of making they're making fun of him. Or, in Mark 15:32, the people again are criticizing Jesus, trying to make fun of him as he's on the cross. They say, "Let Christ the King of Israel descend down from the cross, that we may

see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him" (Mark 15:32). There are many other passages in the scriptures of this negative feeling around *upbraideth*, and the whole point here is that if you lack this, God is not going to throw it in your teeth, he is not going to be upset if you ask him.

How often are we afraid of how God might respond because of all our fallen natures, or because we have some ignorance about something? Or maybe we've tripped up a number of times and we have yet not fully repented of something and we fear that God's going to be mad. James is trying to tell us, you can have full faith that you can get what you seek, that you can fully trust God. And let me conclude talking about this verse with one more verse in the New Testament, and it's Jesus in Luke chapter 2 verse 52. We hear very little about Jesus' young years. We do have this very compelling verse that Luke records and he says, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). Now, a few moments ago, Tyler talked about Joseph Smith's phrase "in the process of time". We all can be patient with ourselves and others that we are all in process, and like Jesus, we can grow in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God.

Now, Joseph has read James 1:5. How easy would it be for him to sit there as he reads that and think, yah, okay. I'll do it. And so, he doesn't need to kneel down, he could just – he could leave his eyes open, the book open and just say, okay, you said Lord that all I have to do is ask, so I'm asking. Which church should I join? He wouldn't have likely gotten an answer. Or even if he had gone into this room and knelt down at his bed and closed the door and poured his heart out to God. The answer didn't come then. You'll notice how it did come. Watch. Verse 12: "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." Now notice the time passage here. "I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know," (JSH 1:12). This is another critical element in the story: how to act. You'll notice Joseph is not seeking the answer to the question, which church is true?

Elder Bednar has spoken about this on a couple of occasions where he points out that Joseph is not asking a curiosity question. I'm curious. Which church is true? I kind of want to know, which is how we use our technology all the time. We have curiosity questions and we want to know. In this case, his question is which church should I join? He's willing to use agency. He's not just asking a curiosity question; he's willing to put his life on the line here, to say I'll do whatever you want me to do. How to act is the key here.

Notice he goes on to say, "...unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible" (JSH 1:12).

Notice the next two words in verse 13: "At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. I at

length," there it is again, "came to the determination to ask of God," (JSH 1:13). You'll notice that it's like this journey, "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little;" that Joseph is going through that, quite frankly, you and I go through, that instead of demanding from God that we go from point A to point Z in an afternoon because we've simply asked the question, or we've read a scripture or two and now want everything to be clear (2 Nephi 28:30). It doesn't usually work that way. When you're talking about addressing the God of the universe, it's not a matter of pushing buttons in order to get something instantaneously, like you would out of a vending machine. In fact, it's not at all like pushing buttons, but it's a lot like pushing ourselves to keep moving forward in faith. I'm not trying to force God to answer my petitions or do things that I demand that he do. I'm seeking to swallow up my will in his will, and Joseph is showing us this beautiful pattern of that kind of perseverance, and that kind of drawn-out trial of faith, where he keeps moving forward.

So, verse 14, he tells you, "It was on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty."

So there have been some scholars who have looked at the weather records taken at some U. S. Military posts near that area, and what they've seen is that, in the early spring of 1820, there really was only one day that didn't have clouds, fog, rain, and that was on Sunday, March 26. Now, we don't have total certainty that that's the date, and ultimately, our salvation doesn't rest on that day. It was also just interesting to be able to potentially pinpoint the time when this transformative and pivotal moment happened, not just for Joseph, but really for all of us who have chosen to spend our time hearing his story today.

Now if you'll look at an overview, a bird's eye view of the Joseph Smith farm, Joseph Smith, Senior and his family, you can see the log home where this family lives, you can see here in this overview where the Sacred Grove lies in relation to the log home, and so you can picture this early morning, a fourteen-year-old boy leaving that farm home, walking into the woods, who has gone through a long process of time trying to seek an answer of, where do I turn for salvation for my soul? And as he goes into the grove, verse 15, he says:

"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. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction."

In one of his other accounts, he tells us that he heard footsteps behind him and he gets up and he looks behind and doesn't see anyone, he kneels back down, hears the footsteps getting closer, looks back, and now he's bound. His tongue is bound. He can't speak and that thick darkness gathers around him.

Have you ever stopped to think about the significance of what's going on here? You see, we love to emphasize the glorious vision, and rightly so. We should emphasize the glorious vision. But

the reality is God's prophets are not just witnesses, special witnesses, of God. They have been allowed to see and experience things that cause them to walk out of the Grove or out of these prophetic experiences with deep knowledge, having tasted of some very, very difficult things. For instance, when Joseph is going to leave the grove and share his experience with a minister and other people, the predominant reaction of many of them is going to be to say to Joseph, no, what you saw, that is of the devil. At that point, our young farm boy can look at them and say, no. That isn't of the devil because I know what's of the devil. I've experienced that at such a profound level, I know the darkness and I know the light and what I experienced was not of the devil. I can tell you about the devil too, but I'm not going to focus on that.

It's this contrast between good and evil that Joseph is going to walk out of the grove with that day that is profound, setting him up for everything else that God has in store for this prophet of the restoration to accomplish in the rest of his life. Notice he says, bottom of verse 15: "Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction." It's this idea of, I'm going to die! I'm going to be killed by this darkness!

Look at verse 16: "But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction," and then he clarifies, "not to an imaginary ruin but the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being – just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light." Now we'll pick up that story in just a minute.

You'll notice, brothers and sisters, that the forces of darkness were working upon him, this powerful being from the unseen world, who seems to recognize this prophet, this boy, this farm boy who's going to become the prophet of the restoration, and sensing the significance of this moment, trying to utterly destroy him at this moment. God doesn't stop it early on or in the middle. He lets it go, go, go until he was, that young boy was ready, he was at the moment where he was ready to finally just abandon himself to utter destruction. And then, and only then, did God come and say, we're going to cast out the darkness, and now the pillar of light comes, causing that dark influence, the devil, to leave.

I wonder if some of you who are watching are going through a period of testing, a period of temptation, a period of trial that has stretched on far longer than you think it should have, far longer than you think you're capable of enduring it. And we sometimes get in this mindset again of, I want instantaneous results. I don't want to have to wait. I don't want to have to work. I don't want to have to endure. But God, who knows everything, isn't trying to give us a pain-free life. He's trying to shape us and mold us and give us experience that would cause us to cleave unto the light and reject the darkness and sometimes that means letting trials last far longer, more years, even in some cases, more decades, than we think were possible or were capable of enduring because then when the light comes, we value it and we treasure it so much the greater at that point.

Now, you can picture this moment. He's a fourteen-year-old farm boy. He did not go into the grove to say, I want to become one of history's greatest prophets. He's a fourteen-year-old poor farm boy. They're struggling to make a living off of the land. He's got a whole bunch of people in his family who are joining one church and others who are persuaded by others and he's got this religious fervor around and he's worried about his soul. He's worried about finding a remission of his sins. Where can he go to connect with God? He just wants to know which church to join. I don't want to be a prophet.

Have you noticed that sometimes you and I go to the Lord with simple petitions but God gives us something that we didn't even ask for in the first place, or opens up things to us that we didn't even know were possible? This is like the ultimate example of that in this dispensation. Here's this boy who had been overpowered, nearly to utter destruction, by the devil, when all of the sudden in his own words, these words: "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!" (JSH 1:17).

So, if we go back to the 1832 account where Joseph only mentions the Lord appearing to him, some have said, why didn't he mention two? You'll notice that was 1832. This vision comes in 1820. Early on in the prophet's ministry as a prophet, there was intense opposition and push-back to any of his telling of two beings coming down. You have to consider the religious perspective of the Godhead at the time. Is it any wonder that maybe his earliest account would maybe be a little more cautious about what he's saying, but then as time goes on and the gospel is being restored more fully, that he becomes more bold in being able to pronounce, I saw the Father, and I saw the Son. And the Father only is recorded here as giving eight words. And you'll notice none of those eight words is complex or difficult to understand. It's Joseph, which, by the way, Joseph just got through with this most terrible experience of his entire life, he being nearly destroyed by this being from the unseen world.

There's something powerful about your name. When somebody says your name, there's something soothing, there's something reassuring about hearing your own name. On that occasion, can I just recommend that never did hearing one's own name come as more reassurance than it did on that occasion to this farm boy? To hear God, the Father, say Joseph, to call me by name, first thing he hears from the Father: Joseph, his own name. And then the seven words after that: "This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" (JSH 1:17).

You'll notice in the video series that the Church has produced over the last twenty years called Special Witnesses of Christ, one of the first ones done was by President Gordon B. Hinckley who is standing in the Sacred Grove when he talked about it. And to paraphrase what he said there, he said it was here that basically that the most powerful testimony given in our dispensation, and possibly ever in the history of the world, the most powerful testimony of Jesus Christ was given there. Why? Because it's the only time in all of our scripture canon where we

get on the fallen earth recorded in scripture pages Father and Son coming down to the mortal, fallen earth and the Father himself introducing the Son.

Now the Father's voice has been heard from heaven multiple times in scriptures. We get it at the baptism of Jesus. You get it at the Mount of Transfiguration. We get the voice of the Father at 3rd Nephi 11 when Jesus descends. And you get it here. The difference here is he's standing there. He's seen. It's the only scriptural account in our canon of scripture where he's personally saying, "This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" (JSH 1:17).

Brothers and sisters, nobody, and I mean nobody, can offer a more definitive, more authoritative, more clear and more powerful testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of a living God, more than God himself personally saying that. This is such a unique experience in that grove that day because you have the Father bearing witness of the Son and saying to Joseph, "Hear Him," and our prophet has asked us repeatedly to pay attention to those two words: hear him.

You'll notice this whole year in the Doctrine and Covenants as we go through the different sections and the different Church history events, the voice you are going to hear more than any other this year is the voice of Jesus Christ speaking to us. And this whole story that we've been covering today, it's less about Joseph and it's more about Jesus than anything else we could discuss. At the end of the day, Joseph Smith is going to be an instrument in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ to build up the Church of Jesus Christ, to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and to translate the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ.

So, on that occasion, you get the Father pointing to the Son, you get Joseph looking at the Son, we can be assured that the Holy Ghost is there, quickening Joseph so that he can abide the presence of the Father and the Son. So, you have the whole Godhead present in that grove and you have the prophet of the dispensation, of our dispensation there, setting the foundation for us to move forward in the faith. "How firm a foundation is laid for your faith" through this event.

Now you'll notice that just because he's seen the Father and the Son, and he's received these glorious revelations, and told that his sins were forgiven, and told don't join any of the churches at this point, just wait. You would think he's had this pinnacle experience, and from here, his life is just going to get easy. His life is going to be simple, kind of like a person who has overwhelming spiritual experiences that convince them that Jesus is the Christ, that the Lord wants them to repent of their sins, and to get baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ, and to move forward on the covenant path, that from that point on everything's going to be easy and simple. Yet, you're going to notice that as we proceed through the rest of this curriculum year, studying the Doctrine and Covenants and Church history, that very few things seem to come easily to this prophet.

Just because God gives you revelation, and answers, and direction, and a calling, doesn't mean that, all of a sudden, you're going to live a life of ease, that it's going to be pain free, that everybody's going to love you and accept you and applaud you for all the good things you're doing. Sometimes it will actually increase the opposition when you move forward.

Brothers and sisters, we're here as a trial of our faith, to be proven, and to be tested, and to learn and grow from our own experience, to distinguish these good and evil choices that we have in front of us as we move forward.

Notice in verse 18 he says: "My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join." Again, there's that agency. I'm willing to act, I'll do whatever you want me to do God and notice that they answered, in verse 19, that he should join none of them. And then the Lord gives Joseph some clarification halfway down through verse 19: "...they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof."

Brothers and sisters, this brings us to a really important point as we contemplate the First Vision event. We can study everything that anybody has ever said or written about this event. We can do everything we can to try to explain it away or to try to prove it to somebody, but at the end of the day, those efforts are probably going to be pretty futile. Notice we can't deny the power of godliness. We can't deny the influence of the Holy Ghost, as we work through the process of time, seeking truth, and it just won't do to kneel down on one occasion, or to have just one fast and say, help me to know if this is true.

Things in the scriptures usually take time, where God gives you experiences, where it then opens channels of communication, where then the revelation can have context; it can mean something to you. It can cause you to then use your agency to become something more like Jesus that we're all seeking, rather than just having it be a curiosity question. I want to know, was Joseph a prophet? Versus, dear God on high, I'm willing to do whatever you want me to do in my life, and it would make a big difference if I knew if what Joseph said is true. Give me experiences please. Teach me, guide me. Help me know what to study. Help me know what to believe and where to express faith so that I can learn "by study and also by faith" to come to know the truth because once I know the truth, the truth will set me free and I can move forward and actually fulfill the missions that thou hast given me.

Now you'll notice he describes something at the bottom of verse 20. He says, "It seems as though the adversary was aware, at a very early period of my life, that I was destined to prove a disturber and an annoyer of his kingdom; else why should the powers of darkness combine against me? Why the opposition and persecution that arose against me, almost in my infancy?" (JSH 1:20). And then he describes how, in the next few verses, how he talked to some people, including this preacher, a friend, he thought, and he was greatly surprised at his behavior, of this Methodist preacher. "He treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt saying it was all of the devil," (JSH 1:21). Once again, Joseph can look at him and knowingly say, oh no. That wasn't of the devil. I can tell you what's of the devil and I don't want to spend any more time in that realm, and the preacher telling him there is "no such thing as visions or revelations in these days. All such things ceased with the Apostles, there would never be any more of them" (JSH 1:21).

Now, to finish this off, notice verse 25. After talking about Paul, or Saul, from the New Testament, being questioned, and told that he was crazy, and that he didn't know what he was talking about, then Joseph says in verse 25:

"So it was with me. I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me, and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart: Why persecute me for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision; and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision, I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it, at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation."

President J. Reuben Clark gave a famous talk entitled "The Chartist Course of the Church in Education". In that talk he said there are two truths that are more important than anything we can teach in gospel settings. Number one, he even called them the latitude and longitude. It's like X marks the spot kind of a thing, to give us this perspective of, here we stand. Number one, it is most important for us to know that Jesus is the Christ. And number two, he said, is that we've got to know that Joseph is his prophet, that he was chosen by God and that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ did indeed appear to the prophet Joseph in that grove on that day, setting in motion this glorious restoration which happened in 1820. But brothers and sisters, this Restoration had been building for centuries through all of those middle ages, and through the Protestant Reformation setting the stage for the revolution, for these pilgrims to come over to the new world to set up a place where religious freedom could be lived, that then sets the stage for this Restoration.

Again, Elder Bednar talks about how sometimes light turns on like a light bulb and other times the light shines as a slow, steady growth as if it's a sunrise. So, for hundreds of years, you get this slow growing of the light even through the renaissance, this rebirth of light, this dawning of seeing things more clearly, and then all of a sudden, spring of 1820. It's as if the sun is now fully visible and we begin the final dispensation of all the gospels, the dispensation of the fullness of times.

Brothers and sisters, of all the things we could say, rather than trying to convince you one way or the other, let me just finish with what I know for myself. I know, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. And I know that Joseph Smith is his prophet, that he did indeed see the Father and the Son, and they spoke to him, and they commissioned him, and they gave him power, and authority, and a mission to fulfill. And now, here we are, 201 years later after this event, still carrying forth that powerful testimony that was planted into the earth on that day over 200 years ago.

Know that he lives. Know that he still guides the Church today through living prophets, seers, and revelators, and that if we'll put our faith in Christ, he will help us carry forth the kingdom triumphantly into all the world. And I leave that with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Gordon B. Hinkley, “Special Witnesses of Christ”. [President Gordon B Hinckley - Palmyra](#)

“How Firm A Foundation”, hymn no. 85. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/music/library/hymns/how-firm-a-foundation?lang=eng>

J. Reuben Clark, Jr. “The Charted Course of the Church in Education”.
https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/bc/content/shared/content/english/pdf/language-materials/32709_eng.pdf?lang=eng

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