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Joseph Smith

An Oration

By Nephi Jensen, President of the Canadian Mission

The Master said, "I came not to bring peace, but a sword." Carlyle evidently had in mind the same thought when he wrote, "Every fact is a battle." The bigger the "fact," the greater the "battle." Truth is the biggest fact in the world. Its clashing with error is the irresistible conflict of the ages.

Every great leader of men is in a measure a personification of truth. The degree of the truth he lives and teaches is the measure of the stir he will make in the world. Christ was "the Truth." His words and works made the shallow, spiritless defenders of old and venerated error rave and gnash their teeth.

When a timid reformer with his insipid sentiment, half error and half truth, comes in contact with the thought and opinions of his time he makes no great disturbance, but when a bold prophet of God, like Joseph Smith, with his bowels full of truth, and the flame-breath of the Almighty upon his lips, announces his deep facts about God, man, and eternity, all the forces of error are lashed into a fury, the wicked frown, the mob raves, and the paid teachers of painted half-truth let loose "the dogs of war" and persecution.

The very roar that went up when the boy Joseph Smith announced his first vision proclaims the divinity of his mission. For a name that "thunders so loud in the index" must be attached to something more than human.

What is in the homely name Joseph Smith that the mention of it should make the wicked rave and the righteous rejoice? Why does it provoke curses from the high priests of error, and call forth praises from humble Saints? Why does it divide humanity into two distinct classes, those who bitterly hate him and those who ardently love him?

The right answer to these questions is the biggest fact in the history of the nineteenth century. It is not found in the word "delusion." The dim eyes of deception never saw as clearly as Joseph Smith did the great fundamentals of religion. Hallucination never founded a perfect church organization and gave to the world a great philosophy of religion. Mental aberration never banded together tens of thousands of men and

women of varied tastes, temperaments and intelligences, and sent them forth to sacrifice all for the salvation of the human race.

Nor can this great prophet's message be driven out of the court of the world's thought and opinion by shouting, "Impostor." His mark upon his age is too deep to be erased by the tongue of slander. "A false man," says Carlyle, "cannot even build a house." And yet Joseph Smith laid the foundation of a Church and erected a superstructure thereon so perfect, in adjustment and practical workings, that it has called forth unstinted praise from even those who hate his name. He bequeathed to this Church a legacy of truth and faith that has nerved his followers with courage to conquer deserts, and fired them with a self-forgetting devotion that impels them to give all for the salvation of mankind. Did a delusion ever give thousands of men and women the fortitude to face the slander and slurs of the wicked and the madness of mobs? Did a "fraud" ever redeem deserts and build sanctuaries of learning in a wilderness? Did a religious falsehood ever put the love of God and man in the human heart? Did perjured stories of revelations from God ever send men out to give their time and money freely to bring souls to Christ? Did pure-hearted women ever pay the homage of their tears at the shrine of a lie? Did true men ever give their hearts' blood for a theological fake?

The explanation of the power of Joseph Smith's name is not found in the epithets "delusion" or "impostor." It is found only in the word "truth." And what a flood of truth he poured into a shallow world of "cold hearts and hastening feet."

His career commenced in 1820, when he was given a vision of the Father and the Son. That year Herbert Spencer was born. The names of both these men have been heard around the world. The one is the synonym of doubt; the other stands for superfaith. The one was the high priest of evolution; the other was a prophet of a living belief. They both strove to find the same thing, the knowledge of God. Herbert Spencer used the key of reason, and Joseph Smith the key of faith. Herbert Spencer sought to find God through an endless analysis of the crust of things. Joseph Smith went by prayer right into the presence of God. Herbert Spencer ended his long life saying, "God is unknowable." Joseph Smith, when only a boy of fourteen, saw the Maker of all, and heard the Voice that had stilled the storm and stayed the wave.

In the age that Huxley glibly talked about an "absentee God," and learned theologians bowed at the shrine of a rhetorical image, Joseph Smith re-discovered the true and the living God. In the teeth of the age-old doctrine of a God "without body, parts, and passions," this bold prophet declared that the

Lord of heaven is a tangible personage of tabernacle, in whose exact image and likeness man was made. He boldly brushed aside the Nicene Council's "congeries of words," descriptive of the Trinity, and plainly averred what the Bible clearly teaches, that the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are three distinct personages, but one in mind and purpose. While the faithless priests of shallow creeds were standing afar off, calling to God in the cold words of learned theological formulas, Joseph Smith re-announced the warm, pulsating truth contained in the Lord's prayer, "Our Father which art in heaven."

His first vocal prayer was the first real faith cry that had gone up from this cold, superstitious world since the dense darkness of the middle ages had driven truth from the altar and living belief from the human heart. It marked the beginning of an epoch. It was the beginning of the real modern spiritual renaissance.

That prayer was the greatest act of a human soul since paganism killed virile faith and turned the simple religion of Jesus Christ into an empty show. The boy who prayed that day in the silent woodland had a heart as deep as truth, and lifted high as heaven. He had the faith that defies fate. Around him were the sophisticated theologians with their hearts full of doubts and their heads full of theological abstractions, wrangling about empty forms and dead ceremonies. All the notions, customs, creeds, and dogmas of the time, denied the possibility of a real answer from God. But in spite of doctrines, dogmas, and doubts, he believed in him who said, "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." The living faith of this boy pierced the blue dome through which no word had passed for seventeen centuries, and called to the earth the Majesty of heaven.

When this boy walked out of that sacred grove, that day, he was greater than the most learned theologians and profoundest philosophers. He knew the key to the knowledge of God. He had a power greater than that possessed by a potentate. He held in his heart the most powerful thing in the universe, the omnipotent faith that makes the powers of heaven the servants of men.

Before Joseph Smith saw that vision, in answer to a prayer inspired by a specific Bible promise, the Bible had for centuries been a mere fetish. It had been a dead letter, containing the decrees and promises of God to another age. He put spirit and life into the dead letter by demonstrating that God would do today the very things he promises in his book. By the magic touch of this prophet's faith, the Bible became in fact and

truth the Book of God, a compendium of his veritable promises to all men of all ages and all climes.

At a time when the theologians of all creeds and churches said that the Bible contained all that God intended to reveal to man, Joseph Smith, by divine inspiration, translated the Book of Mormon from the gold plates which contained the record of God's hand-dealings with his "other sheep," the ancestors of the American Indians. Before he knew that John the revelator had predicted that in "the hour of God's judgment" an angel would "fly in the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell upon the earth," Joseph Smith declared that these gold plates had been revealed to him by an angel. In less than a century after he had given the Book of Mormon to the world, as the gospel brought to the earth by an angel, about half a million people had accepted the message. These zealous followers of Joseph Smith have translated the Book into fourteen different languages, and they are sending the message it contains to every "nation, kindred, tongue and people." (Rev. 14:6.) Thus was literally fulfilled a Bible prophecy, the meaning of which had not been discovered by the most profound students of the scriptures.

Pursuant to divine revelation he organized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is an exact duplicate of the one the Messiah established eighteen centuries before. This Church has in it every officer which the Christ placed in his primitive Church, from the council of the twelve apostles, high priests, seventies, elders, and evangelists down to the minor officers, priests, teachers and deacons. These officers are endowed with the holy Priesthood, which has come down to them through men who had received it by actual ordination from Peter, James, and John who came to this earth in the nineteenth century for the express purpose of imparting the Priesthood. In this Church are present the real gifts of the Holy Ghost: prophecy, revelation, visions, healings, gifts of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

While Egyptian was an absolutely dead language, unknown to even the foremost scholars, Joseph Smith, by the light of inspiration, translated from Egyptian the lost Book of Abraham. The prophet's explanation of the Egyptian figures in the facsimiles printed in the Book of Abraham have been proved to be correct. In the accomplishment of this work of translation alone, Joseph Smith affixed the broad seal of divinity upon his work.

Through divine inspiration he was given the true prophet's foresight. Twenty-eight years before the outbreak of the American civil war, he predicted that a war would commence with

“the rebellion of South Carolina,” that the “southern states” would “be divided against the northern states,” and that the southern states would “call upon Great Britain” for assistance; and that this struggle would “terminate in the death and misery of many souls.” Every detail of this prophecy became tragic history in the death-struggle between the southern and northern states of the American Union. Over a million graves in the American Union today attest the true prophetic power of this most remarkable man.

In the place of spirituality, he found sentimentality. The preachers talked eloquently about the Pentecostal, cloven tongues of fire, but never dreamed that people living eighteen hundred years after Peter preached and “pricked the hearts” of sinners, could enjoy the Spirit which testifies, reveals, and prophesies. While the divines were still graphically describing the great things God had done for his people of old, Joseph Smith fervently testified of the great things God is now doing for his people of today. He re-affirmed the promises of old and demonstrated their validity.

He answered the question, “From whence came man?” in the way in which the poet and philosopher is now beginning to answer it. In the words, “Man is that he might have joy,” he gave the best and truest explanation of the purpose of man’s existence. While the theologians were still saying that man was merely a son of the sod, he declared man to be actually and in truth the son of God, destined in the “eternal years of God,” to overcome, improve, develop, increase in intelligence, wisdom, goodness, power and glory until he becomes perfect, “even as God in heaven is perfect.”

He exploded the infinitely cruel doctrine of eternal punishment, that arbitrarily consigns to the eternal, unquenchable flames all non-Christians, and gives wings and harps to all, good or bad, who simply speak the words, “I believe on Jesus.” He re-affirmed the declaration of John, that man will be “judged according to his works.”

He dispelled gloom from the tomb. He denied the narrow dogma that man’s hope of salvation is interred with his bones; and taught the beneficent doctrine of salvation for the dead.

He gave to the word heaven a new meaning. He took out of it the impossible notion of winged angels everlastingly playing on harps, and declared heaven to be a place where the truest human ties are inviolate, and the gentlest memories of this life are mingled with the joys and glories of the life that has no end.

He gave to the world the most salutary, hygienic rules, contained in a divine revelation known as the “Word of Wis-

dom," which prohibits the use of tea, coffee, tobacco, intoxicating drinks, and the excessive eating of meat. Subsequent to the proclamation of this revelation, scientific investigations have demonstrated the great value of these wholesome rules of practical living. The observance by the followers of Joseph Smith of these and other laws given by this prophet has reduced their death rate to 8.3 persons per thousand annually as compared with the rate of 13.5 persons per thousand in the United States at large.

His niche in the ages is secure. His mighty fact is already commencing to thunder louder than the mendacity of his misguided enemies. The story of his triumphant faith is the most thrilling incident in modern annals. It gives hope, light, and life. It is the beacon that lights the way across the dark chasm which ages of ignorance and superstition have placed between man and God. Tens of thousands of true-hearted men and women who have heard this story of all-conquering faith have gone in quest of the knowledge of God with a sincerity and fervor so genuine that they have received that witness of God's Spirit which has made them so certain of God's existence, the divinity of Christ's mission, and the reality of the future life, that the besetting evils of this world have lost all power over them.

What a man he was! He was a seer. With the white light of God's Spirit he saw the past of nations now covered with the dust of ages. He was a prophet. By the inspiration of the Holy Ghost he saw tomorrow and tomorrow's morrow. He was a teacher. He gave to the world, at its most enlightened period, a sane, sensible, original, and comprehensive religious philosophy which has successfully weathered the opposition of the learned and the persecution of the wicked for nearly a century. He was an organizer. By the aid of divine inspiration he established a Church so perfect in organization and internal workings that it commands the praise of even those who despise it. He was a leader of men. By the magic power of his pure character, genuine sincerity, and deathless integrity to truth and God, he gathered about him, as his aids and lieutenants in the work of righteousness, a coterie of men of the highest probity and the greatest native intelligence.

He belongs to the ages. The trumpet call of his mighty faith-fact will yet reverberate through all lands and climes, and turn a doubting world back to God. All who heed the clear, shrill out-tringing of this deep, certain note of hope will forever honor this true prophet of God. As long as men aspire to fervent faith, love, truth, and honor God, they will hold in eternal veneration, the name of this great and good man who discovered faith taught the truth, and glorified God.