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Read the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: The author writes concerning the value of reading the Book of Mormon. He adds his testimony to those of the Three Witnesses, Joseph Smith, and the book itself.

*Sunday Afternoon Session,
October 1, 1961*

KEEP GOD'S COMMANDMENTS NOW

*Milton R. Hunter
of the First Council of the Seventy*

My dear brethren and sisters, we are living in a great age of the Church. I thrill when I think about the tremendous growth that is taking place, and especially when I meditate on the development of the various phases of church activity. This unusual growth and development has taken place primarily during the past few years since President David O. McKay became leader of the Church.

As President Henry D. Moyle said yesterday, truly the stone has been cut out of the mountain without hands, and it is destined to roll forth and fill the whole earth. (See Daniel 2:34-35, 45.)

As I travel throughout the Church and meet with the stake presidencies, the other officers, and the people in general of the various stakes, I thrill with their devotion. Thousands and thousands of them have an eye single to the glory of God and to the upbuilding of the kingdom. They hear solemn testimonies that Jesus is the Christ and that this is his true Church. I marvel how devoted to the cause of righteousness many Latter-day Saints are.

On the other hand, when I look at the reports of the various stakes and observe how many members have their names on the records who are not keep-

ing the commandments, it causes my heart to sadden. It causes me to want to do all I can to help change that condition. I strongly desire that all Latter-day Saints work out their eternal exaltation now while the opportunity is ours.

It seems that many in the Church do not appreciate the gospel. They do not realize that if they attain the greatest amount of joy in this life and eternal life in the world to come, they must prove faithful now. This life is our opportunity. Yes, our chance to serve God is now! Today is the day for us to prepare to meet God. We cannot put it off until the next world.

Some 2,500 years ago, Nephi, looking down through the stream of time, saw our day and prophesied about it extensively. He said that in the last days the God of heaven would proceed to bring forth a marvelous work and a wonder. He described this work and the great effect it would have upon the people of the world.

Nephi also proclaimed that many Church members in our day would not be faithful. He said that they would be influenced by the Evil One; that they would be deceived and dragged down to hell. Let me read one of Nephi's statements:

"And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God.

"Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and

vain and foolish doctrines, . . ." (2 Nephi 28:8-9.)

It seems to me that the principle theme of this conference has been obedience to God's commandments. I have a strong feeling in my heart this afternoon to say something to cause some of us to recognize the importance of keeping God's commandments at the present time while the opportunity is ours.

I remember that a few years before President Grant died, he came to a general conference one day and said that while preparing his mind for conference he had wondered what great blessing he could give to the Latter-day Saints. He pondered on what good thing he could do for them. And then he remarked, "Under the inspiration of the Lord I have come to conference with the one simple idea, 'Keep God's commandments!'"

Many Latter-day Saints think that they can reject temple marriage, fail to pay their tithes and offering, commit various sins here in mortality and that they will have another chance to make all of this up in the life to come. I desire to emphasize the point that now is the time for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to render obedience to all of the Master's laws and ordinances. It is required that we keep God's commandments now, because we have taken upon ourselves the name of Christ. We are members of his Church, and so we are having our opportunity to render obedience to all of his commandments now. We should perform our own ordinances in the temple and keep all of the Lord's commandments while the day lasts, because for us the night may come wherein we cannot work. That would be terrible if we had not proved faithful.

In the account of the grand council of

READ THE BOOK OF MORMON

*Alma Sonne
Assistant to the Council of the Twelve*

President McKay, brethren and sisters, after having listened to the music during these conference sessions, and after

having heard the prayers which have been so fervently offered, and hearing also the stirring sermons which have been delivered, and having felt the spirit of all meetings in this conference, I have been led to say in my own heart, "Surely this is the marvelous work and wonder spoken of by Isaiah the prophet."

Seven or eight months ago President Joseph Fielding Smith in speaking to the General Authorities of the Church suggested that each one of them read the Book of Mormon during the year. Like many others, I began the reading. I have almost finished it. At the same time I also read Orson Pratt's treatise on the book as he wrote it many years

ago. It has been refreshing and stimulating to me and certainly very enlightening, even though it has been read and referred to many times over the years.

Elder Pratt, in writing his analysis of this latter-day scripture, makes this statement: "The book must be either true or false. If true, it is one of the most important messages ever sent from God. If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked, bold, deep-laid impositions ever pawned on the world."

Many people during this year are reading the Book of Mormon. Many have read it in the past, and many will read it in the future. It was given

heaven we read: "And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell;

"And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them, . . ." (Abraham 3:24-25.)

Thus, in the very beginning—even in the spirit world—we were informed that mortality was to be a state of probation, a proving ground, to see if we would keep all of God's commandments. That same idea was verified in a modern revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith to the Latter-day Saints. Jesus Christ, our Lord, declared:

"And I now give unto you a commandment to beware concerning yourselves, to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life.

"For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God." (D&C 84:43-44.)

A little later another revelation came to the Prophet which warned the Saints as follows:

"For if you will that I give unto you a place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves by doing the things which I have commanded you and required of you." (*Ibid.*, 78:7.)

Jesus Christ is the great Lawgiver and Judge. He is the one that will give us our rewards and blessings for righteousness, and, on the other hand, withhold blessings or give us the punishments for failing to live righteous lives. He judges on a very fair basis by eternal law. He cares not whether one is rich or poor, bond or free, male or female.

Jesus judges by what is in one's heart: ". . . for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," (Matt.

12:34), and, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: . . ." (Proverbs 23:7.)

And so the Lord's judgment will be based upon law. We shall receive exactly what we merit. We read in the Doctrine and Covenants:

"There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—

"And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated." (D&C 130:20-21.)

As we learned in the Mutual theme a few years ago, the Lord also said:

"I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise." (*Ibid.*, 82:10.)

I think, my brothers and sisters, that we should not only avoid committing sins, but we should also avoid doing things that appear to be sinful.

When I was a young man, I heard a good woman say several times, "Don't do anything wrong. Don't do anything that even appears to be wrong."

Of course, at that time I thought that that statement was somewhat foolish; but as I have become older and have observed human nature, I have come to know that the example we set causes many people to do wrong. Our example may also cause them to do right. And so now I think that that statement is a very wise one.

Let me illustrate with a little personal experience. A few years ago, accompanied by a welfare man, I was on the way to Seattle to a stake conference. The train stopped at Portland for the passengers to eat breakfast. As we ordered our breakfast, as usual the waitress asked if we would care for coffee. Of course, as always, we replied, "No, thank you." But when she brought the breakfast, she set two cups of coffee be-

side our plates and left quickly.

I said to the welfare man, "I am not going to leave this coffee beside our plates while we eat."

He replied, "We could push them aside a little distance from our plates, and I think it will be okay."

The waitress returned about then. I asked her to remove the coffee, stating that we had not ordered it. No sooner had she got away from the table with the two cups of coffee than the door opened and in walked the stake president of the Portland Stake. He spied us immediately, came over and sat down by us, and conversed with us all the time while we ate breakfast.

When we got back on the train, the welfare man said, "My, that was a narrow escape. If we had had that coffee on the table, we could not have convinced that stake president that we had not ordered it and that we had not intended to drink it."

Brothers and sisters, all of us who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have entered into a covenant with the Lord to keep all of his commandments now while here in mortality. In the words of the Preacher:

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14.)

I humbly pray that as members of the true Church, we will strive hard "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God." (See Micah 6:8); and after mortal life has closed, may we find a glorious home prepared for us in his mansion on high.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

to the world through Joseph Smith the Prophet when he was a young man in his early twenties. The Prophet was a humble man. He was unlearned in the arts, the sciences, and literature of the world. At the same time he laid no claim whatever to any literary power or ability. The book was not produced as a result of prolonged preparation or any studious effort such as the writing of a book would entail. It is in perfect harmony with the Bible teachings. It contains a similar message and emphasizes the same truths. No book was ever written with a higher and a nobler purpose. Its aim is to teach the Jew and the Gentile that Jesus is the Christ,

the Eternal God who manifests himself to all nations.

It is and always has been a builder of faith and a converter of souls. Its power in these respects is marvelous and beyond the understanding of the unbelieving and those who "are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight." A humble approach to its reading is necessary.

Readers of the book are left with God's help to determine its value, its divinity, and its truthfulness. They are not asked to consult with the scholars or the recognized men of learning as to its validity. They are cautioned, however, to ask God the Eternal Father in

the name of Jesus Christ regarding the reliability and the trustworthiness of the message it contains, directed as it is to the Jews, the Gentiles, and the remnant of the Nephite race.

Under that procedure they will receive a testimony as to its sanctity and authenticity which is stronger and mightier than all the arguments of cynics and skeptics. No one has found anything that nullifies the testimony of the three witnesses to this sacred volume. Their testimonies still stand. Not a single thing has been brought to light, not a single thing to discredit their solemn declaration. It was challenged, as you may know and surmise, and the

integrity of the witnesses was questioned. Their characters were assailed, and they were accused of being in collusion with a wicked pretender and a false prophet.

It has always been so and naturally was expected, for the world is full of doubters and cynics. Jesus knew this when he talked to Nicodemus. "We speak that we do know," said Jesus, "and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

"If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" (John 3:11-12.)

These were the words of the Master, but these witnesses never wavered in their testimony. They left the Church and were unfriendly to the Prophet. They were excommunicated at a time when the Church needed their support. There is something dramatic about Oliver Cowdery's return to the Church. The day he came back the fortunes of the Church were at their lowest ebb. The people were outcast and had been driven from their homes and possessions. Fully repentant, Oliver Cowdery was baptized and entered the Church as a humble member.

Martin Harris returned and was bap-

tized after a long period on the outside. His numerous testimonies to his neighbors and friends are a vindication against the charges that he had denied his testimony.

David Whitmer, disgruntled and disappointed, did not return. He claimed the Church had left him; that he had not left the Church. He evidently lacked humility which is required of faithful members of the Church. His last act was to reconfirm his testimony and to rebuke those who had accused him of being unfaithful to the written document which he had signed. He executed an affidavit on his deathbed to silence

"I GIVE YOU MY TESTIMONY"

*Gordon B. Hinckley
of the Council of the Twelve*

My beloved leaders, my dear brethren

and sisters, it would be neither appropriate nor desirable for me to speak at length. I wish merely to share briefly with you some of the feelings of my heart.

Sister Romney told me yesterday afternoon that she knew that I was the one to be sustained because of the appearance of my eyes when she talked with me yesterday morning. I confess that I have wept and prayed.

I think I feel some sense of the burden of this responsibility to stand as a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ before a

world that is reluctant to accept him. "I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me." I am subdued by the confidence of the Lord's Prophet in me, and by the expressed love of these, my brethren, beside whom I feel like a pigmy. I pray for strength; I pray for help; and I pray for the faith and the will to be obedient. I think that I need—and I feel that all of us need—discipline, if this great work is to roll forward as it is ordained to do.

I expressed three and a half years ago when I stood here my appreciation

WHEN THE SPIRIT SPEAKS

*S. Dilworth Young
of the First Council of the Seventy*

Yesterday Elder Marion G. Romney mentioned the matter of the Holy Spirit and said that one does not hear it with his ears. May I read to you a verse of scripture which verifies that. Nephi was rebuking his two brothers who were intent upon killing him as they journeyed toward the Promised Land. He reminded them that they thought to murder his father, but also their intent was to murder him, and therefore in

their hearts they were murderers. Then he reminded them of the times which the Lord had tried to impress them in these words:

"Ye have seen an angel, and he spake unto you; yea, ye have heard his voice from time to time; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice;"—and this is the part I would like to have you hear—"but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words; . . ." (1 Nephi 17:45.)

I used to wonder why Nephi didn't say "hear his words." Now I know that one doesn't hear them with his ears, as Brother Romney said. But into a person's mind there come words. These seem to be his own words, but with the Spirit upon him, are not his words. With these words comes a feeling. One actually feels the words, just as Nephi said. These brothers had lost that feeling, and therefore could not detect words given by the Spirit as apart from

their own thoughts.

This "feeling" comes to all who will hear. One's first experience in this likely is akin to those of all converts to the Church when they read what Moroni said. He told them that after they had heard these things, if they would ask God they would know of their truth. (Moroni 10:4.) I believe that James was referring to this fundamental truth when he wrote these words, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, . . ." (James 1:5.) The Prophet Joseph, reading, was impressed to go to the woods and pray. Anybody who cannot learn to hear by feeling will not go very far in the Church, in my humble opinion, for I believe that to be the way the majority of us know if these things are true.

By that Spirit which whispers in my soul, and which I feel with my heart and my feelings at the same time, the knowledge of which rings constantly in

those who had questioned his integrity.

But the book itself is the best evidence of its divinity. If the book is a fraud, Joseph Smith knew it. There could be no question in his mind about its being fraudulent or genuine. He had the answer. Thousands have read it and have come away with the same testimony which he and the others gave. Not a single logical explanation has been offered to discredit the claim of the Prophet and his associates. The book still stands as a divine record, unmarred by the attacks of critics, most of whom were insincere and untrustworthy.

If Joseph Smith wilfully and deliber-

ately fabricated that volume and gave it to the world as scripture, he was unworthy of the confidence of all good men. Of all men he would be the most deceptive and the most dishonest. He would be a stranger to every divine and holy impulse. By every law of affinity his mind would be darkened by his evil designs. God's Spirit would depart from him. No heavenly inspiration or enlightenment could emanate from one so bad, but his scriptural productions, every one, emphasize moral and spiritual values. They are warnings against wrongdoing. They are confirmations of Bible teachings.

The Book of Mormon especially is a strong indictment against every sin in every form. I beg of you, brethren and sisters, to read the book; and as you go home following this conference, open the sacred volume and read it slowly and prayerfully, chapter by chapter, until it is finished, and, if you will do so, God will bless you. He will strengthen your testimony. He will increase your faith, and he will bless you in your devotion to the great cause for which we all stand.

May you and I be faithful in all things I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

for the name which I bear [Bryant S. Hinckley, his father], which has come from faithful forebears, who gave much and received little that I might receive much while giving little.

I was moved this morning as the choir sang that great anthem, "Crown Him Lord of All." The unity, the harmony, and the discipline of this choir always impress me. Now, my brethren and sisters, God has written the score which we are to perform. Our prophet is our director. With effort and with harmony we can stir the world and "crown him

Lord of all," if we have the will to discipline ourselves with that restraint which comes of true testimony.

I would like to say that this cause is either true or false. Either this is the kingdom of God, or it is a sham and a delusion. Either Joseph talked with the Father and the Son, or he did not. If he did not, we are engaged in blasphemy. If he did, we have a duty from which none of us can shrink—to declare to the world the living reality of the God of the universe, the Father of us all; and of his Son, the Lord Jesus

Christ, the Savior of the world, our Redeemer, the Author of our salvation, the Prince of Peace.

I give you my testimony that this is true. It is not false. Our detractors may debate theology, but they cannot refute this testimony which has come by the power of the Holy Ghost into my heart and into your hearts, and which I solemnly declare this day as I express unto you my appreciation for your sustaining hands and hearts, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

my whole being, I know that Joseph Smith received many of his revelations by that means. By that whispered feeling, too, I know that he was a prophet of the Living God and that President McKay is likewise a prophet of the Living God. I would ask only one thing, that each of us as we leave this conference ask ourselves if during any of these meetings, we felt in our hearts the whispering, and had the words form into our minds as the whispering became feeling, and the message came clearly into our minds that the speaker has spoken truly. "That is true doctrine. He is speaking truth to us," it tries to say.

To me this conference has been filled with that type of thing. I am proud to be a member of the Church. I am delighted to have the opportunity of bearing my testimony that I know these things are true, and I do it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

WINTER WORD

BY GILEAN DOUGLAS

*There must be a strange white word for this,
Slow as the flakes which enchant the air
With their languid dance and their clinging kiss
And their veils cast off for the hills to wear.*

*Deep as the drifting by wood and stone
And deep enough to rebury spring,
Soft as a sigh or the muted tone
Of the glissade's sibilant whispering.*

*Still as the river's glacial trance,
As the great fir heavy with snow and night;
For the vaped breath and the wintered glance
There must be a word that is strange and white.*