

THE SURE WORD OF GOD THE FATHER: “THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, HEAR HIM”

John W. Welch

No message could be more important for all people in the world to hear than this one. On three momentous occasions in the history of the world, God the Father has introduced his Son Jesus Christ precisely using these words: “This is my beloved Son, hear Him.”¹

Those three times were: [1] As He introduced His Son to Joseph Smith on a beautiful spring morning in 1820 near his parents’ cabin in Palmyra, New York; [2] at the Transfiguration of Jesus, when He addressed the three chief apostles, Peter, James, and John (Matthew 17:5); and also, [3] in Bountiful, as He spoke to the righteous survivors who had come together at their temple marveling and seeking guidance (3 Nephi 11:7).

Each of these three instances teaches us things about how the Father would like us to hear Jesus. In his First Vision, Joseph listened personally and privately. Through the Transfiguration, we learn to hear the Lord through His authoritative priesthood leaders. And with the people assembled at the temple in Bountiful, we learn to hear Him collectively, as His righteous covenant community.

HEARING HIM PRIVATELY

During his relatively brief mortal ministry, Joseph spoke often of what he had heard. Of the many occasions on which he testified to others about this amazing experience, several accounts mention these particular words of the Father as He introduced His Son to Joseph:

In 1835, as W. W. Phelps recorded, Joseph preached to a Church audience in Kirtland on the subject of “*This is my beloved son, hear him.*”² How wonderful and inspiring it must have been to hear the Prophet himself delivering a sermon on this very subject! One can only imagine what Joseph said on that occasion. No doubt he was invited to address that subject because of his own experience hearing those words in 1820.³

In 1838, as he dictated his own History, Joseph recorded: “One of them spake unto me calling me by name and said (pointing to the other) ‘*This is my beloved Son, Hear him.*’”⁴

On August 28, 1843, David Nye White, an editor for the *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, visited Joseph in Nauvoo and reported things that Joseph had told him. In particular: “Directly I saw a light, and then a glorious personage in the light, and then another personage, and the first personable said to the second, ‘*Behold my beloved Son, hear him.*’”⁵

And on May 24, 1844, Alexander Neibaur, a recently arrived immigrant convert in Nauvoo, record in his journal: “Br Joseph tolt us . . . saw a fire towards heaven[,] came near & nearer[,] saw a personage

¹ At the baptism of Jesus, the voice of the Father was also heard to say according to Mark and Luke, “Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22), or according to Matthew, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). On that occasion, the emphasis was on recognizing Jesus (as in Psalms 2:7), not in telling others to “hear him,” and thus that imperative was not included on that occasion.

² William W. Phelps to Sally Phelps, June 2, 1835, MS, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, UT.

³ He may also have mentioned the great vision he shared with Sidney Rigdon in 1832, when they saw Jesus “even on the right hand of God,” and heard “the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father” (D&C 76:23).

⁴ JS-H 1:17; John W. Welch, *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations 1820-1844* (Provo: BYU Studies, 2005), 15.

⁵ Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 25.

[the Father] in the fire[,] light complexion[,] blue eyes[,] a piece of white cloth drawn over his shoulders[,] his right arm bear[,] after a while a other person came to the side of the first[.]” After telling Joseph not to join any of the existing churches, the Father said, “but *this is my Beloved son harken ye him.*”⁶

From the Prophet Joseph’s experience, we can learn many things about hearing the Lord. Joseph Smith heard these words from the Father when Joseph was all alone. Taking private time to get away, to leave the ways of the world behind, open our spiritual ears that we might hear, and our hearts that we can understand.

Joseph had been taught by righteous parents, and he had been inspired and reassured as he read the scriptures. Having the word of God planted and nurtured in our minds prepares our soul to perceive and resonate with the mind and will of Christ, to hear and to recognize when He is speaking to us.

The young Joseph had pressing questions and needs that no one seemed able to answer or fulfill. He took time out of his regular routine to focus on these matters of eternal importance and to take his requests and questions to God. In his heart, he sincerely desired forgiveness. In his mind, he willingly sought and accepted personal direction. Because he was ready, willing, and able to say, let thy will, not my will, be done, he heard Him.

In addition, Joseph was willing to speak up and share his experience, bearing testimony of what he had heard. One reason that Joseph heard more was that he was willing to impart it to others. One way to hear more is to speak up about it, to magnify each gift we are given in ways that glorify Him and help others. Otherwise, that which we have may “be taken away even that which he hath” (Matthew 25:29).

HEARING HIM AUTHORITATIVELY

These same words of the Father were also heard by Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. They heard him in power, authority, glory and majesty. Words from this important event are recorded in Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-10, and Luke 9:28-36. Though not exactly the same, these three gospel accounts are substantially in harmony with each other. They teach us more about “hearing Him.”

Jesus took these three apostles with him “up into a high mountain” (Matthew, Mark) “to pray” (Luke). Going up into the temple, the House of the Lord, is our way, today, of going up into “the mountain of the Lord” (Psalms 24:3). There we hear the word of the Lord.

And Jesus was “transfigured before them” (Matthew, Mark). “The appearance of [the] face [of Jesus] became something other [*heteron*] (Luke), and his “face did shine as the sun” (Matthew 17:2). His garments became “white as the light” (Matthew 17:2), “shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no [cleanser] on earth can white[n] them” (Mark 9:3). We position ourselves to hear of the Lord when we are dressed in white baptismal or temple clothes, and are filled with the spirit, repent, and are purified, “having the image of God engraven upon [our] countenances (Alma 5:19).

Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus. Presumably, they reported to Jesus their stewardships over the law and the prophets, acting within their Levitical and Melchizedekian authority. We hear Him also when

⁶ Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 26.

we operate within priesthood lines of authority. He harken unto him when we covenant to obey, when we go and do the things He has commanded, and remain focused and not distracted.

So impressed were the apostles that they suggested making holy protective tabernacles for those three exalted beings. We also truly hear the Lord as we respect Him, esteem Him highly, enshrine Him in our memory, and treat Him as all-important.

And then, when a cloud or a heavenly veil then came down upon this scene, “they feared” (Luke 9:34). To fear also means to revere. Again, they were struck with awe and reverence. As they were speaking, they were silenced. We hear best when we think less about our own ideas and listen instead to the Lord. “The Lord is in his holy temple: Let all the earth keep silence before him” (Habakkuk 2:20).

At that point, the voice of the Father came through the veil, or out of the cloud saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; *hear him*” (Matthew 17:5), or simply, “This is my beloved Son: *hear him*” (as recorded in Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35).

Hearing this, the apostles remained silent (Mark 9:6); they fell on their faces, bowing down in humility, filled with fear, awe, and reverence (Matthew 17:6). Jesus then came to each of them, and He touched them, one at a time, and said “arise, and have no fear” (Matthew 17:7). While we have only a very brief sketch of all that happened here, it may well have had something to do with the fulfillment of the promise that Jesus had made to Peter very shortly beforehand to give to him “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19). Joseph Smith taught that at the Transfiguration these apostles received “the fullness of priesthood or the law of God.”⁷ We likewise “hear him” when we receive the fullness of the priesthood.

As the apostles looked up, Moses and Elijah had departed, and so they saw no one except Jesus (Matthew 17:7; Luke 9:35). They were commanded by Jesus to keep silent “in those days” (Luke 9:36) about this sacred experience, telling no one until after “the Son of man is raised from the dead” (Matthew 17:7; Mark 9:9). Peter apparently heard and obeyed this commandment. Though under pressure, he held his tongue and did not tell what he knew of Christ until after the resurrection of Jesus.⁸

WE HEAR HIM AS HIS COVENANT PEOPLE

The third occasion on which the Father introduced his Son is found in 3 Nephi 11:7. As the people in the city of Bountiful had gathered at their temple, hoping to receive further light and knowledge in light of “the great and marvelous change which had taken place” at the death of Jesus (11:1), and as “they were also conversing about this Jesus Christ” (11:2), they heard a voice “as if it came out of heaven” (11:3). It was not harsh. It was not loud. It was small. But “it did pierce them that did hear to the center,” causing their bodies to shake and their hearts to burn (11:3).

⁷ Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 158; Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 211, 246, 285 n8, 331. See also the comment of President Heber C. Kimball that Jesus had “inducted his Apostles into these [temple] ordinances.” *Journal of Discourses*, 10:241.

⁸After the Resurrection, Peter did speak about this experience. In 2 Peter 1:16-17, Peter reminds his readers that he had told testified to them that he, James, and John “were eyewitnesses of his majesty” at the time when “there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory [saying], This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (2 Peter 1:16-17). Peter’s words here agree with the opening words in Matthew’s version of the words of the Father in Matthew 17:5.

Altogether, as a people, they heard the voice which said, “Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—*hear ye him*” (11:7). In this case, the command to “hear him” is in the plural: “Hear *ye* him.” The invitation and the imperative was extended here to all the people as a whole. We, too, hear Him, as a people.

For all of that day, these people listened to the Lord (3 Nephi 11-18). They listened as families, concerned for each other. They listened as disciples, charged with important duties. They listened as covenant makers, saying yes to keep His commandments. They listened in harmony, in order to avoid disputations. They listened to promises that applied collectively to *all* they that mourn, to *all* who hunger and thirst, to *all* the pure in heart, to *all* the peacemakers, and to *all* who are persecuted.

They heard Him issue callings to them to be the salt of the earth and the light to others on a hill. They heard Him call them to suppress anger, to not be judgmental, but to be reconciled with others in the covenant community. They heard Him pleading with them to be faithful to each other as spouses, to turn the other cheek, to give generously to those who ask, to love and pray for enemies, to give alms for the poor, to pray alone and also as a group to build the kingdom of the Father on earth as it is in heaven. (3 Nephi 11-14).

They heard Him as He taught them of his future plans for the gathering of scattered Israel and the collective building of Zion. (3 Nephi 15-16). They heard Him as He healed their sick, as He prayed for them as parents, as He blessed their children, and as He administered the sacrament, instructing them to pray together, to meet together, and to care inclusively for each other. (3 Nephi 17-18).

In all of these ways, they heard Him as His people. As a covenant community. As fellow Saints, thinking about each other, caring for each other, and helping one another.

For all these reasons—personal, organizational, collective—Jesus came into this world. That all might know Him to be the One whom the Father had sent. That He might die to atone for the sins of all the world. That He might overcome death, unlock the gates of hell, rise from the tomb, and come forth in resurrected eternal glory.

THE CHRISTUS STATUE INVITES THE WORLD TO HEAR HIM

And thus, it is especially appropriate and inspiringly significant that Bertel Thorvaldsen, who was commissioned to sculpt this monumental work in 1820, would choose to portray the *Christus* as the Resurrected Savior, a presentation rarely found behind the high altar in Christian churches.⁹ The plaster cast of the statue was present for the rededication of the Cathedral of Copenhagen on June 7, 1829. The finished work, together with the twelve apostles, was dedicated on the Feast of Pentecost in 1839.

Here is the resurrected Lord, showing the signs of the crucifixion in his hands, feet, and side, standing in glorious white. The Savior’s unclad feet stand on holy ground. They are the blessed feet of him who brings good tidings. His arms are extended to the viewer below, and the hands are blessing and inviting. The wounds are clearly visible, almost touchable. Behind the *Christus* is a shiny gold curved

⁹ Anne-Mette Graygaard and Eva Henschen, *On the Statue of Christ by Thorvaldsen* (Copenhagen: The Thorvaldsen Museum and the Church of Our Lady, 1997), 65.

background, signifying the glory of the sun, placed as a radiant veil between the ordinary world and the heavenly presence beyond.¹⁰

And most relevant to the present topic, the inscription directly above the *Christus* reads, “DENNE ER MIN SØN DEN ELSKELIGE HØRER HAM / MARCI. IX. 7.” Although written in Danish, these words are not difficult for English or German speakers to recognize. In English, they say: “This is my beloved Son, hear him / Mark 9:7”). Obviously, these are the words spoken by the Father to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, as reported by Mark and Luke. They are also precisely the words spoken by the Father as He introduced his Son to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1820, as well as the words spoken by the Father announcing the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to the people in Bountiful in the Book of Mormon.

Latter-day Saint missionaries first came to Denmark under the leadership of Apostle Erastus Snow in the fall of 1849. On one occasion, Elder Snow sat through a service in the cathedral in Copenhagen and mused to himself, if the statues of Christ and his Apostles were alive, what they might say to the archbishop and his clergy?¹¹

We might equally wonder, if Joseph Smith had still been alive, what might he have said to the people of Denmark, if he had been given the opportunity to deliver a sermon there?

And what might Mormon have said, if he were given the opportunity to spread in person the words of the Father, found in his book, inviting thousands upon thousands of Danish converts not just to see the sculpted *Christus*, but to hear Him, the living Christ, who willingly manifests Himself unto all nations.

¹⁰ The details and descriptions are excerpted or paraphrased from my article, “The Christus in Context: A Photo Essay,” *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 54 no. 2 (2015), 148-161, at <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/christus-context-photo-essay#footnote-004>, used by permission.

¹¹ William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia* (1957; repr., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 36.

