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Notes on Moroni's Message

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Abstract: Lists fourteen specific points related to Moroni's visit, including the value of repentance, prayer as a catalyst, the promise of universal salvation, and warnings concerning covetousness.

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On September 21, 1823, about three years and a half after the First Vision, the Prophet had his second great divine manifestation. Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith. 2:28—50.

I. The Natural Education of the Prophet.

The work of God is accomplished in a natural manner. The Lord does not expect impossibilities of his children. When demand is made for powers beyond those natural to man, divine help is provided; but ordinarily the patient will of God is worked out through the process of life on earth.

Nowhere is this more beautifully illustrated than in the gradual preparation of Joseph Smith for the great work that had been assigned to him before the earth was formed. When the boy Joseph Smith was in his fourteenth year, at the time of the natural awakening of his emotional powers he was given his first vision. Even then, the essence of the message was only that he must keep himself in readiness for the truth that was to be given him. When he was nearly eighteen years of age, he had his second great vision, and the purpose of his life work was explained in definite teachings. During the intervening three years and a half, the boy had ripened in life experience, and he had reached a stage of maturity in which ideals begin to crystallize for life. Four years later when

he was twenty-two years of age, he was given possession of the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. At that age maturity had been largely won, and the serious work of life could be begun. During these eight years of preparation, there was no forcing of natural law. The divine purpose was unfolded through the normal and natural development of the human mind in a mortal body. The purpose of the training was always kept in view. From infancy the prophet was placed in a congenial environment for the work to be done; and as soon as childhood was passing, the First Vision was given, and from that time on the young man was educated by special divine influences. It might be well if man made schools would take more to heart the lessons of this course of education.

II. The Resistless Power of Repentance.

One evidence of the genuineness of the Prophet's narrative is the simple confession of his errors. During the interval between the First Vision and Moroni's visit, the boy had been "guilty of levity and sometimes associated with jovial company, etc. not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God." For these minor follies he was sincerely repentant. He always had in mind the message of the First Vision. It was on an occasion when

he was pleading with the Lord for the forgiveness of his follies that the second great vision was given him. Repentance, sincere and continued, blots our sins from the eyes of God.

III. *Moroni's Visit Initiated by Prayer.*

Our heavenly Father stands ready to give; but He requires that his children ask. It would not be natural to force blessings on anyone.

The First Vision came after the boy had prayed earnestly. The second vision, Moroni's Visit, came likewise, after the young man had prayed for further light and knowledge. If repentance is irresistible, prayer is even more so. If the children of men would only approach God, clean and repentant, in earnest prayer, what great gifts might not be vouchsafed man!

IV. *The Message Given in Light.*

The message that Joseph Smith was instrumental in bringing to the world is one of pure truth. The errors that enslave men are forged in darkness. Superstition thrives only in dim light. It is not surprising therefore that the heavenly personages who taught Joseph Smith, stood before him in full light. The light that filled Joseph's bed chamber before the coming of Moroni was "exceedingly light, lighter than at noon-day," and the personage, Moroni, who appeared "was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning." It is a characteristic of truth that it is accompanied by light. Secrecy and the whispered word were akin to error. Throughout the Church, established through Joseph Smith, candor, openness, and enlightened truth prevail. The truth to all in full daylight, might well be a motto of the Church.

V. *Moroni's Introduction.*

In harmony with this open treatment of truth, the heavenly messenger called Joseph by name, then gave his own name and declared himself a messenger from God. How widely different this is from the frequent initiation or meeting where mysticism and secrecy prevail. It is difficult to conceive of a divine message coming by the hand of an unknown messenger.

VI. *Joseph's Call.*

Joseph's call to service, which was then stated by the angel, must have come with terrific force to the young man, if he even glimpsed the import of it. Usually work carries with it positive reward, but in this case praise and blame were to be blended. His name "should be both good and evil spoken of among all people." This statement has been literally fulfilled. Among his followers and some others, the Prophet Joseph Smith has been well spoken of; but over the earth his name has been held in contempt by the majority of men. During his lifetime the Prophet was hunted as if he were an animal. Arrest, trial, and imprisonment followed each other until his death; yet he was never found guilty of violation of the law. The pathos of the Prophet's life mellows every honest heart; yet he deliberately faced the consequences of accepting the call brought him from Moroni carrying with it both good and evil. The lesson of Joseph's call is obvious. Manifestly, none of us dare to flinch before God's call. Though man's reviling may follow, the brave accept their destiny and serve on in joy. Moreover, no man must expect his labor to be understood by all. Someone will always misunderstand. It is not stated

whether Joseph voiced his acceptance of the call, yet it is not improbable that he did so, for the angel went on to elaborate his message.

VII. *The Restoration of the Gospel for the Last Time.*

The few simple words in which the Prophet tells the message of Moroni, only suggest the tremendous panorama of coming events which Moroni unfolded to the understanding of the wide-eyed boy. The Gospel is eternal; it has been lost in its purity from the earth; it is to be restored; the restoration means the beginning of the last days; signs and wonders shall be seen in the heavens and upon the earth; coming events shall be shown to old men in dreams and to young men in visions; meanwhile the Church shall be organized; messengers of truth shall go out among the nations; the blood of Israel shall be sought out from the four corners of the earth; all men shall hear the Gospel; the Lord will come for the second and last time; in time every knee must bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ; the millenium shall be established; peace shall reign upon the earth; and all things pertaining to the earth shall be accomplished. And most marvelous of all, to the humble, unlearned boy lying upon his wakeful pillow with wonder in his heart, he was to be the instrument in God's hands by which the foundation for this work of the last days shall be laid. To attempt to state the message of Moroni would be to tell the whole story of God's plan for his children and his hand dealings with the human family from the beginning. There can be no doubt that Moroni's words portrayed to the boy the structure of all that which he was to do in the service of God and man. Into the

Gospel map so drawn by the angel at the very beginning of Joseph's ministry, were fitted from time to time all the efforts of his later life in the organizing, building, and teaching of the Church of Jesus Christ.

VIII. *The Book of Mormon to Come Forth.*

In the Panorama of coming events as shown to Joseph on this memorable evening, one scene was emphasized because it was the first that should be enacted. Certain gold plates giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from which they sprang "were to be given to Joseph and he was to translate them, and the Book was to be an additional witness for God, giving the fulness of the Gospel in new words. The next day the young man was to see these plates. Truly the promised labor was near at hand. He had the witness of the vision. Moroni was a real personage; his words were heard; his message was understood; yet he was to have the witness of substantial matter, in the plates which he was to lift and left until he should know beyond doubt that they were real.

IX. *Universal Salvation Promised.*

Another scene in this panorama of the Eternal Plan was emphasized because it is as the great cementing principle of the Gospel. The first and fifth verses of chapter 3 in Malachi were deliberately changed, to make clear the thought that the Plan of Salvation is for all who have been sent on earth, and that one of the signs of the last days is that means will be devised by which the ordinances belonging to this earth may be done for the dead, so that they in turn may, through their willingness

to accept the truth in the hereafter, achieve a part in the gift of salvation. In addition, this principle foretells the sealing power, the authority of the Priesthood, which was to be possessed by the Prophet and the Church to be founded by God through him.

X. *Beware of Covetousness.*

When the angel returned the third time and repeated the recital, he also warned the youth against temptation of using the golden plates as a means for alleviating the period of poverty through which the Smith family were then passing. Only things fundamental were mentioned in this basic message. Covetousness carries with it essential danger. He whose heart is set upon gold for its own sake, can seldom find time or place for the deep things of God. Only one motive must influence those who would learn of divine things: To glorify God by giving all to the building of His Kingdom. This lesson was for the youthful prophet; but it may be used by all who hope for spiritual progress.

XI. *The Reality of the Message.*

Surely it was a vast view of things to come! Small wonder that the angel repeated it four times; and that the youth was utterly exhausted when it was all over. Up to this moment he had waited for further light, and here was light beyond the strength of natural sight. So far he had had the memory of the holy visit in the sacred grove; here was a continued presence throughout the night of a real personage speaking and repeating real words, and in understandable words portraying tremendous conception. As if to give the youth no excuse, a further witness was to be his, that of lifting, handling, and examining the golden plates.

Every sense was to be satisfied; all doubt was to be removed; no certainty was to be greater than the truth of Moroni's Visit and message. Even after the long night of communion with Moroni, the lesson was to be reinforced; for the next day, in broad daylight, the messenger appeared again and repeated for the fourth time the message of the preceding night. The vision had been seen by day and by night; its reality had been tested by all the senses of the coming Prophet. His great work of the future henceforth rested on the unshakeable foundation of the reality of the First Vision and Moroni's Visit. In consideration of the greatness of the work to be done, of its measureless importance to mankind, would any lesser effort to impress the senses of the youth, have been justified? If the Prophet had been an impostor would his story have had the natural intimate quality, which now impels men to conviction.

XII. *Remembering by Telling.*

It is clear to every reader that the attempt of Moroni was to fix indelibly upon the mind of Joseph the things he had been told, and the reality of the whole occurrence. Therefore, the three separate and distinct night recitals, and also the daylight recital. Therefore, also, the opportunity to handle the plates the next day when all that had happened was yet fresh in his mind. However, one of the best methods of fixing truth upon the mind is to tell that which has been learned to someone else. This was not overlooked by Moroni. After the daylight recital of the message, Joseph was instructed to go to his father, who was working in the field, and to rehearse the whole matter to him. At every point, the truthfulness of the Prophet's story is confirmed.

XIII. *The Exhaustion from Spiritual Experiences.*

After Moroni's third visit, on the night of September 21, 1823, the youth found that it was morning. The whole night had been consumed in the recitals of the message. The young man was "overwhelmed in astonishment;" the experience had been so strange as to invite every power of his mind for its explanation. It had been a concentrated lesson, to the following of which he had given his whole attention. When he arose and attempted to work he found himself so exhausted as to have no strength left. It is altogether too often believed that spiritual growth comes without effort. On the contrary, things of the spirit require for their attainment, the toil of attention and seeking, and they consume largely the physical strength of man. Ease is won only as spiritual strength is acquired by exercise.

XIV. *Peace.*

It seems almost a pity that the Prophet in his beautifully simple account of the visit and message of Moroni says so little about his own emotions on this most wonderful occasion. He does describe the utter physical exhaustion which followed the vigil of the night and the intense application necessary to comprehend the message. He also tells that between the visits of the angel he lay "musing on the singularity of the scene, and marveling greatly at what had been told me," and was "overwhelmed in astonishment at what I

had heard and seen," and that he was left to ponder on the "strangeness of what I had just experienced." Thought—provoking, certainly, were the events of the evening. In one simple sentence of a few words he reveals what was probably his dominating emotion on that occasion. The angel Moroni appeared, unannounced, in a brightness beyond earthly light. It was natural to feel an emotion akin to fear. The Prophet says; "When I first looked upon him I was afraid; but the fear soon left me." *The fear soon left me!* What eloquent though simple a description of the Prophet's feelings on that great night! Throughout the ages, men have sought to banish fear of the unknown in God or man or nature. Here in these few words this youth, who became the Prophet of the last dispensation, declares that in the presence of a most extraordinary personage he had no fear. May it be wrong to add, that in his heart was peace, that peace which passeth understanding," and which is the natural right of all who dwell in the light of truth and who receive it willingly? Driven and harassed as Joseph Smith was throughout his life, he yet walked in the light of the divine truth, which he had received, and the peace of God, which he found on the occasion of Moroni's Visit, was always within his heart. Does not the possession of that peace compensate for all the tribulations of life? Happy thought, that all may win that peace, by obedience to truth—the whole truth!