

“WE THANK THEE, O GOD, FOR A PROPHET”

LESSON #37

BY TED L. GIBBONS

Introduction: Yesterday (Sunday morning, October 7th) I sat in the Conference Center and listened to the words of the Lord’s servants. Among those speaking was the man we sustain as the Lord’s Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, Gordon B. Hinckley. I felt his power. I met President Hinckley in person in 1966 in the mission field, and sensed his apostolic mantle then. Again in 1973 when he ordained me to an office in the priesthood, and I felt the weight of his hands, I knew I was in the presence of a man of God. I have in my heart a great certainty of who and what he is. The witness of his prophetic calling has come to me over and over again, but never with more power than when I have been in my living room, surrounded by my family, as we have listened and watched him speaking to us from a television in the corner of the room. This is not a lesson about technology, but my heart has often been aflame with rejoicing over the words of living prophets, and also over the opportunity to see and hear those prophets and words in my own home. The Lord has been good to us.

1. OUR NEED FOR A LIVING PROPHET

“President Wilford Woodruff once related that in a meeting held in Kirtland, Ohio, in the early days of the Church, one of the leaders addressed a group of the brethren on the subject of the living oracles of God. The brother who addressed the group set forth his beliefs in these words:

“‘You have got the word of God before you here in the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants; you have the written word of God, and you who give revelations should give revelations according to those books, as what is written in those books is the word of God. We should confine ourselves to them.’

“When this speaker had finished his remarks, the Prophet Joseph

Smith turned to President Brigham Young and said:

“ ‘Brother Brigham I want you to take the stand and tell us your views with regard to the living oracles and the written word of God.’ Brother Brigham took the stand, and he took the Bible, and laid it down; he took the Book of Mormon, and laid it down; and he took the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and laid it down before him, and he said: ‘There is the written word of God to us, concerning the work of God from the beginning of the world, almost, to our day. And now,’ said he, ‘... those books do not convey the word of God direct to us now, as do the words of a Prophet or a man bearing the Holy Priesthood in our day and generation. ...’ When he was through, Brother Joseph said to the congregation, ‘Brother Brigham has told you the word of the Lord, and he has told you the truth.’ ” (C.R., Oct. 1887, p. 22; cited in Alma P. Burton, “Follow the Brethren,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1972, PP.5)

President Wilford Woodruff on another occasion explained:

“We may take the Bible, the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, and we may read them through, and every other revelation that has been given to us, and they would scarcely be sufficient to guide us twenty-four hours. We have only an outline of our duties written; we are to be guided by the living oracles.”

President Taylor explained the reality of this need with these words:

“... we require a living tree—a living fountain—living intelligence, proceeding from the living priesthood in heaven, through the living priesthood on earth. ... from the time that Adam first received a communication from God, to the time that John, on the Isle of Patmos, received his communication, or Joseph Smith had the heavens opened to him, it always required new revelations, adapted to the peculiar circumstances in which the churches or individuals were placed. Adam’s revelation did not instruct Noah to build his ark; nor did Noah’s revelation tell Lot to

forsake Sodom; nor did either of these speak of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. These all had revelations for themselves, and so had Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jesus, ... John, and Joseph, and so must we, or we shall make a shipwreck." (Millennial Star, vol. 9., p. 323)

Certainly you have understood this reality, but it might be worth the effort of a few moments in a lesson or in a family hour to have participants list the matters of which modern prophets speak and about which earlier prophets, even earlier in this dispensations, had no concerns nor insights. This list might include such things as pornography or the Equal Rights Amendment or sex-change operations or abortion. What a blessing it is to have the words of the former prophets so that we can know concerning "the doings of the Lord in other lands, among people of old." (1 Nephi 19:22.) But that will never be enough.

2. THE ROLES OF OUR LIVING PROPHET

In 1980 President Benson spoke at a BYU Devotional. His talk was entitled "14 Fundamentals in Following the Prophet." Those 14 fundamentals offer a comprehensive portrait of the qualities we should recognize in a prophet. Below are the headings of the fourteen points, each of which was the subject of inspired commentary by President Benson.

1. The prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything.
2. The living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works.
3. The living prophet is more important to us than a dead prophet.
4. The prophet will never lead the church astray.
5. The prophet is not required to have any particular earthly training or credentials to speak on any subject or act on any matter, temporal or spiritual.

6. The prophet does not have to say, "Thus saith the Lord," to give us scripture.
7. The prophet tells us what we need to know, not always what we want to know.
8. The prophet is not limited by man's reasoning.
9. The prophet can receive revelation on any matter, temporal or spiritual.
10. The prophet may be involved in civic matters.
11. The two groups who have the greatest difficulty in following the prophet are the proud who are learned and the proud who are rich.
12. The prophet will not necessarily be popular with the world or the worldly.
13. The prophet and his counselors make up the First Presidency, the highest quorum in the Church.
14. The prophet and the presidency—the living prophet and the First Presidency—follow them and be blessed—reject them and suffer.

We sustain our Church Presidents as Prophets, Seers, and Revelators. Consider for a moment the meaning underlying each of those titles. In what way does our living prophet fulfill each of these responsibilities?

A few chapters in 1 Samuel suggest 13 things that a prophet will do for his people:

A PROPHET

1. is "a man of God." (1 Sam 9:6)
2. Is "honourable." (1 Sam 9:6)
3. Can "shew us our way that we should go." (1 Sam 9:6)

4. "Is now called a Prophet." (1 Sam 9:9)
5. Is "called a Seer."
6. "Will tell thee all that is in thine heart." ((1 Sam 9:18)
7. Will "Shew thee the word of God." (1 Sam 9:27)
8. "Hast not defrauded us . . ." (1 Sam 10:4)
9. "Hast not . . . oppressed us . . ." (1 Sam 10:4)
10. Has not "taken ought of any man's hand." (1 Sam 10:4)
11. Will reason with us (1 Sam 10:7)
12. Will not cease to pray for us (1 Sam 10:23)
13. Will teach us "the good and the right way." (1 Sam 10:23)

3. HEEDING THE WORDS OF THE LIVING PROPHETS

If an announcement came that the Savior himself would speak in our next General Conference, would your attitude and preparation for the even change at all? Of course he will. He had made his will abundantly clear in this matter. :What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same." (D&C 1:38) Not "almost the same," or "very similar." or "nearly identical." It is the same. We are under divine directive to treat the inspired words we hear from the Lord's servants as we would treat his words. Thus we can honestly ask ourselves. "What did the Savior ask me to do in this past Conference?"

If the Savior was going to speak and the program was going to be broadcast to your television, what other events or considerations would be significant enough to cause you to skip the program? What if an announcement came that the lead article in next month's *Ensign* was to be written by the Lord himself? How difficult would it be to convince you not to read it?

The Lord emphasized this point in a revelation given the day the Church was organized. "For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.

Speaking of this passage, President Harold B. Lee taught:

"We have some tight places to go before the Lord is through with this church and the world in this dispensation, which is the last dispensation, which shall usher in the coming of the Lord. The gospel was restored to prepare a people ready to receive him. The power of Satan will increase; we see it in evidence on every hand. There will be inroads within the Church. . . . We will see those who profess membership but secretly are plotting and trying to lead people not to follow the leadership that the Lord has set up to preside in this church.

"Now the only safety we have as members of this church is to do exactly what the Lord said to the Church in that day when the Church was organized. We must learn to give heed to the words and commandments that the Lord shall give through his prophet, `as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me; . . . as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.' (D&C 21:4-5.) There will be some things that take patience and faith. You may not like what comes from the authority of the Church. But if you listen to these things, as if from the mouth of the Lord himself, with patience and faith, the promise is that `the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name's glory.'" (D&C 21:6.)"
(Conference Report, Oct. 1970, p. 152.)

I think it would bless our lives immeasurably if we had the kind of attitude about the words of prophets that is indicated in the illustration below:

"I was recently in Vavau, Tonga. It is a little island which is 1-1/2 hours away from Nuku'alofa by plane and twenty-four hours away by boat. By boat is the worst trip that can be made. (If you don't believe that, ask Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, who went there recently to organize a stake and couldn't get a plane.) When the Area Conference was announced for Tonga, it was determined that only one boat would be available for the Saints from Vavau. The boat held 150 people. If you stuffed bodies into every

possible corner of the ship, you could get close to 300 people. *Eight Hundred Tongans jammed onto that boat and stood up for twenty-four hours without sleep, without food, without drink, without anything—because they knew that a prophet of God was going to be in their islands and they were not going to miss him for anything in the world.*

“Do you want to go to conference that badly? Do you care that a prophet of God is speaking in the neighborhood? Do you care enough to flip on a television set, a radio, or to come to [a] building to watch a priesthood meeting? Eight hundred people stood up for twenty-four hours to get to conference . . . “The President of the Church is here,” they said. “That’s our prophet, and we may not see him again soon.” And they came.”
 (“Remembered and Nourished by the Good Word of God,”
Jeffrey R. Holland, BYU, Sept 26, 1976)

An additional element from this event came to light when I shared this story with a ward in my stake. Members of the ward who were from Tonga came forward after the meeting to tell me that they were in Vavau when the area conference occurred. They told me that as the boat pulled away from the dock, headed for Nuku’alofa, there were church members jumping in the water and swimming to the boat, still trying to find a place on the vessel. They also told me that a second boat came just after the first had departed and took a much smaller group in substantial comfort to the area conference.

We must find better ways to understand and apply the messages of the prophets. In my home we buy Ensigns with conference talks for each family member as soon as they become available. Then we take a sabbatical from our weekday scripture reading and review the talks from conference together, marking key passages and looking for things we ought to be doing individually and as a family.

Ezekiel spoke of the danger of doing something less than obeying.

“Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking

against [better: about] thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not." (Ezek. 33:30-33)

It is not enough to talk about conference. It is not enough to come to conference or to sit and listen to conference or to hear the words spoken in conference. We must make application to our own lives. We must be different because of the conference experience. We must **do** something.

4. LATTER-DAY PROPHETS' EXAMPLE OF CHRISTLIKE LOVE

The Savior spoke to his American Twelve and said:

And know ye that ye shall be judges of this people, according to the judgment which I shall give unto you, which shall be just. Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am. (3 Nephi 27:237)

As we have watched the prophets across the years, we have seen over and over again that their lives reflect this instruction. In so many things and in so many ways, they have shown themselves truly Christlike. We ought to follow their example even as we try to follow their words.

"Junius Burt of Salt Lake City, a longtime worker in the Streets Department, related a touching and inspirational experience. He declared that on a cold winter morning, the street cleaning crew of which he was a member was removing large chunks of ice from the street gutters. The regular crew was assisted by temporary laborers who desperately needed the work. One such

wore only a lightweight sweater and was suffering from the cold. A slender man with a well groomed beard stopped by the crew and asked the worker, "You need more than that sweater on a morning like this. Where is your coat?" The man replied that he had no coat to wear. The visitor then removed his own overcoat, handed it to the man and said, "This coat is yours. It is heavy wool and will keep you warm. I just work across the street. The street was South Temple. The good Samaritan who walked into the Church Administration Building to his daily work and without his coat was President George Albert Smith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His selfless act of generosity revealed his tender heart." ("My Brother's Keeper:" President Thomas S. Monson C.R., April 1990)

In the same talk, President Monson recalled another incident with a coat:

During a drive to amass warm clothing to ship to suffering Saints, Elder Harold B. Lee and Elder Marion G. Romney took President George Albert Smith to Welfare Square in Salt Lake City. They were impressed by the generous response of the membership of the Church to the clothing drive and the preparations for sending the goods overseas. They watched President Smith observing the workers as they packaged this great volume of donated clothing and shoes. They saw tears running down his face. After a few moments, President Smith removed a new overcoat that he had on and said, "Please ship this also." The Brethren said to him, "No, President, no; don't send that; it's cold and you need your coat." But President Smith would not take it back. ("My Brother's Keeper:" President Thomas S. Monson C.R., April 1990)

Another example:

"In that remarkable biography [*Spencer W. Kimball*, by Edward L. and Andrew E. Kimball, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977] is a story about a woman who was in O'Hare Airport in Chicago during a

big snowstorm. Planes had been confused in their schedules and thousands of people were stranded. Her money had run out, she had a two-year-old child, and the child was hungry and dirty. The woman was two or three months pregnant and had been told not to hold this child because it might have an adverse effect on her physically. So the child was on the floor of the airport. The woman was in one line after another trying to buy a ticket to a Michigan point. People were criticizing her because she would reach forward with her foot to push the child up in the line as the line moved along, because she couldn't pick the child up.

"She was in anguish when a man approached her with a kindly smile on his face. He said, 'Young lady, it appears to me that you need help.' He took the dirty little two-year-old child in his arms and loved it, patted it on the back, gave it a stick of chewing gum. Then he went to the people in the line and he told them about the woman—ow she had to get a flight out to Michigan. They agreed, under the influence of his spirit, to let her go ahead of them. He took her to the flight and got her started on her way. As she boarded the plane, the woman thought to herself, 'What a wonderful man, and I don't even know his name.' But a few days later, in a newspaper, she saw a picture of President Spencer W. Kimball." (Norman Vincent Peale, *Ensign*, May 1980, p. 109; cited in "The Gospel of Love," *Ensign*, Dec. 1985, 23–24)

CONCLUSION:

"On one occasion, Karl G. Maeser was leading a party of young missionaries across the Alps. As they reached the summit, he looked back and saw a row of sticks thrust in the snow to mark the one safe path across the otherwise treacherous glacier.

"Halting the company of missionaries, he gestured toward the sticks and said, 'Brethren, there stands the priesthood [of God]. They are just common sticks like the rest of us, . . . but the position they hold makes them what they are to us. If we step

aside from the path they mark, we are lost.'" (In Alma P. Burton, Karl G. Maeser, Mormon Educator, Salt Lake City, Deseret Book Co., 1953, p. 22.) ("From Such Turn Away": Elder Boyd K. Packer: C.R., April 1985)

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