

D&C LESSON #9

“THE ONLY TRUE AND LIVING CHURCH”

By Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: Close behind the organization of the church in the meridian of time came the apostasy accompanied by a diversification of beliefs that would lead ultimately to thousands of different Christian denominations. Every doctrinal disagreement was cause for a reorganization: perhaps the only cause. In any religious organization where doctrine does not matter, or where there is unity of opinion about the doctrine, splinter groups are not likely to break off from the main body. But thousands *had* broken off and now, on the 6th of April of 1830, the time had finally come for the Lord to put things right and to restore “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth . . .” (D&C 1:30)

1. THE CHURCH IS ORGANIZED IN THE LATTER DAYS.

When Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith, he quoted numerous passages from the Old and the New Testaments, all of them related to the restoration of the Gospel in the last days. Joseph wrote:

After telling me these things [relating to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon], he commenced quoting the prophecies of the Old Testament. He first quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi; and he quoted also the fourth or last chapter of the same prophecy, though with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles. . . .

And again, he quoted the fifth verse . . .

He also quoted the next verse differently. . . .

In addition to these, he quoted the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, saying that it was about to be fulfilled. He quoted also the third chapter of Acts, twenty-second and twenty-third verses, precisely as they stand in our New Testament. He said that that

prophet was Christ; but the day had not yet come when "they who would not hear his voice should be cut off from among the people," but soon would come.

He also quoted the second chapter of Joel, from the twenty-eighth verse to the last. He also said that this was not yet fulfilled, but was soon to be. And he further stated that the fulness of the Gentiles was soon to come in. He quoted many other passages of scripture, and offered many explanations which cannot be mentioned here. (JSH—1:36-41)

It was April 6, 1830 that this momentous event took place—an event hardly noticed on this planet but no doubt celebrated in the most remote of the celestial regions. Six men formally and legally organized the church according to the laws of the state of New York and according to the will of God.

Consider the years of preparation for this event, and particularly the significance of the Book of Mormon in preparing the Prophet and other believers for the restoration.

With the exception of the First Vision in 1820 and the restoration of the Priesthoods in 1829, almost every major event of the 1820's is related to the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon. The book came from the press about the last week of March of 1830, and the following week, on the day specified by the Lord, Joseph proceeded with the organization.

2. THE LORD COMMANDS CHURCH MEMBERS TO FOLLOW THE PROPHET.

Records indicate that more than 50 people met at the Whitmer home in Fayette, New York on that early Spring day to establish what was first called *The Church of Christ*. The name of the Church that we use at the current time was indicated by revelation in 1838 (see D&C 115:4).

At this organizational meeting, Joseph and Oliver were sustained as the presiding officers of the Church. the Lord then gave a revelation to the people there assembled in which he clarified the relationship of the Church to the Prophet. The Lord said the saints in Fayette and in all the world,

Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith. (D&C 21:4,5)

These verses are worth careful attention, for the Lord defines some principles in a clearer way than perhaps at any other time in our history.

We are to give heed to “all his words and commandments.” There is no wiggle room here for those who want to distinguish between the commandments of the Lord and the words of the living prophet. We are to give heed to all of both of them. In addition, we are to do so with “all patience and faith.” How many hundreds of times in our history has the Prophet called upon members to do things that require both patience and faith. Married men including fathers with sick families were called on extended missions. Families were directed (forced!) to leave homes and belongings behind again and again. Men and women with newly constructed homes in the Salt Lake area were called to go to remote corners of Zion and colonize new communities (my Great Grandfather planted nine orchards before he ate a piece of fruit). The list is extensive. And those faith-requiring callings were not always dramatic nor earth shaking. Sometimes they seemed to be tiny things.

Sweat streaked Ephraim’s face. He had arrived in Salt Lake Valley a few weeks before and was building his first home. There was a strong frame of thick pine poles. Next to the frame, piles of yellow-brown adobe bricks were stacked neatly. They were good, strong bricks made from fine clay, the finest in the valley.

To help him build the walls, Ephraim had hired a bricklayer. They had finished laying the brick walls waist high when they heard the carriage coming. The lizard vanished beneath the rock.

Brigham Young leaned forward in his carriage. His shirt and trousers were gray with dust.

“Brother Hanks, how thick are you building the walls?”

“Eight inches, President Young.”

Brigham licked his lips, moved his eyes slowly over the building frame and partially finished walls, over the stacked pile of bricks, and then directly into Ephraim’s eyes. Ephraim felt their deep, blue embracing power. Brigham’s lip curled up and a broad smile spread across his face.

“Double that,” he said. “Make those walls 16 inches thick.”

Before Ephraim could ask questions President Young disappeared behind a cloud of dust. The dust settled slow in the still, hot air.

“Sixteen-inch walls,” the bricklayer exhaled. “That’s crazy. That’s twice as many bricks. We’d have to tear everything down, start over. We’d even have to build new frames. Most people only build six-inch walls. Sixteen inches is crazy.”

The bricklayer looked down at his hands and then took off his hat and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. It left a dark streak.

“You’re not going to do it are you, Eph?”

“Sixteen-inch walls,” Ephraim repeated the words. Silent, he watched the dust settle. The lizard came from under the rock and sat motionless in the sun. Ephraim tasted the hot air.

Sixteen-inch walls, why? He thought of the work already put into the house. It would take two more weeks just for brick with 16-inch walls. Was President Young just throwing advice out of the top of his hat?

Ephraim squatted down and drew a circle in the gray soil. The hot stillness was intense. He could hear the bricklayer’s breathing. Anger came into him suddenly. He took a handful of

soil in a tight fist.

“No. I will not do it.”

His muscles tensed. The veins stuck out on his arms.

Then he relaxed his hand. The soil sifted through his fingers.

“Have I come this far for nothing? Nauvoo, the Mormon Battalion? I’ve followed him here. I won’t stop now.” He exhaled softly.

“Sixteen-inch walls,” Ephraim smiled and looked at the bricklayer. “Maybe President Young is just throwing advice out of the top of his hat, maybe not. It doesn’t matter. The Lord chose him to lead, and I’m gonna follow.”

A week after the house was finished, the rain came. After a month of no rain, it came in hard driving waves from fierce, black clouds. At first it pocked the earth with small craters, the dry soil unable to hold it, and the water rolled off, cutting little, growing furrows. Then the furrows snaked down and met with a hundred more furrows until the dry wash beds filled with angry, gray water. The floods came out of the canyons, newborn rivers, covering, fanning out, ripping, and tearing.

Then the rain stopped, and the sun sent warm, orange radials down from a rift in the clouds. Most of the new houses along the foothills were gone, clothing, furniture, everything not carried to high ground, lost beneath alluvials of mud and rock.

But in the orange glow the 16-inch walls still stood.

Patience and faith indeed! These words seem to warn us that we must not base our obedience on understanding but on conversion. If the Spirit has testified to us that we are led by Living Prophets, then we ought to be up and doing when they point out the way. Our response ought to be like that of Adam who was commanded without any explanation to offer the firstlings of his flock as a sacrifice unto the Lord. After many days of obedience, an

angel appeared and asked him what he was doing. "I know not," he replied, "save the Lord commanded me." (Moses 5:5,6)

There are three promises in D&C 21 for those who obey in this matter. The Lord promised,

For by doing these things (1) the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and (2) the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and (3) cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name's glory. (D&C 21:6)

This section suggests a way to increase our desire to believe his words. Reflect on these words from D&C 21:9:

For, behold, I will bless all those who labor in my vineyard with a mighty blessing, and they shall believe on his words, which are given him through me by the Comforter, which manifesteth that Jesus was crucified by sinful men for the sins of the world, yea, for the remission of sins unto the contrite heart.

The suggestion of this verse is that those who labor in the vineyard will believe in the words of the prophets, and that that belief is a "mighty blessing."

We must learn the will of our Father in Heaven by earnest study. Next, we must act upon it. Study alone is not sufficient; we must act upon the words of revelation before we know of a surety of the truthfulness of the doctrines. On the day the Church was organized in 1830, the Lord gave a wonderful promise to those who labor in the vineyard:

"For, behold, I will bless all those who labor in my vineyard with a mighty blessing, and they shall [page 65] believe on his [Joseph Smith's] words, which are given him through me by the Comforter, which manifesteth that Jesus was crucified by sinful men for the sins of the world, yea, for the remission of sins unto the contrite heart."

If we will follow, with diligence, the counsel and instruction that is

the united voice of these Brethren, we will know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether they speak of themselves. (L. Aldin Porter, "The Revelations of Heaven," Ensign, Nov. 1994, 64–65)

Speaking on this same verse, a latter-day apostle observed:

There is one more verse we should note particularly; we can take it as a test to measure personal discipleship: "For, behold, I will bless all those who labor in my vineyard with a mighty blessing"—this applies to all of us—"and they shall believe on his words [those of Joseph Smith], which are given him through me by the Comforter, which manifesteth that Jesus was crucified by sinful men for the sins of the world, yea, for the remission of sins unto the contrite heart" (D&C 21:9). The test of discipleship is how totally and completely and fully we believe the word that was revealed through Joseph Smith, and how effectively we echo or proclaim that word to the world. (Bruce R. McConkie, "This Generation Shall Have My Word through You," Ensign, June 1980, 56)

3. THE LORD ENCOURAGES CHURCH MEMBERS TO MEET TOGETHER OFTEN TO PARTAKE OF THE SACRAMENT.

It may be important to observe that at the first meeting of the church, many of the things we accept as commonplace and necessary were absent. No bishopric presided. No high councilmen spoke. No church hymnals were available. Members did not leave the meeting to attend Sunday school classes or priesthood meetings. All of these things would come later, of course, but in the beginning the meeting focused on the most important things in laying the foundations of the restorations. They had the sacrament. By directing the inclusion of this ordinance in the very first meeting of the restored church in this dispensation, the Lord emphasized the centrality of this ordinance in our worship.

In the revelation given in conjunction with the organization of the Church, the Lord revealed anew (although the words were in the Book of Mormon) the sacramental prayers. He directed:

It is expedient that the church meet together often to partake of bread and wine in the remembrance of the Lord Jesus . . . (D&C 20:75)

The Savior taught in 3 Nephi 18 that when we partake of the bread and water we bear witness (testimony) of something. After they disciples had partaken of the bread, the Savior commanded

And this shall ye do in remembrance of my body, which I have shown unto you. And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me. (3 Nephi 18:7)

After they had partaken of the wine, he taught

. . . this doth witness unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you. (3 Nephi 18:10)

As we partake of the emblems of the sacrament, we witness to the Father that we do always remember his Son and that we are willing to do the things he has commanded us to do. I think as we participate in this holy ordinance we ought to be mindful of those things we are witnessing “unto the Father.”

In a revelation given just four months later, the Lord gave additional information about this ordinance. He reminded the members of the church that the importance of the sacrament was not in the materials being consumed, but in the attitude of those participating.

For, behold, I say unto you, that it mattereth not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink when ye partake of the sacrament, if it so be that ye do it with an eye single to my glory--remembering unto the Father my body which was laid down for you, and my blood which was shed for the remission of your sins. (D&C 27:2)

In this same revelation the Lord promises that he will partake of the sacrament with us at a later date.

Behold, this is wisdom in me; wherefore, marvel not, for the hour cometh that I will drink of the fruit of the vine with you on the earth . . . (D&C 27:5)

This meeting is one to which all the redeemed will be invited, for after mentioning twelve specific individuals who will attend, the Lord says he will partake

. . . also with all those whom my Father hath given me out of the world. (D&C 27:14)

Elder McConkie wrote of this meeting.

Before the Lord Jesus descends openly and publicly in the clouds of glory, attended by all the hosts of heaven; before the great and dreadful day of the Lord sends terror and destruction from one end of the earth to the other; before he stands on Mount Zion, or sets his feet on Olivet, or utters his voice from an American Zion or a Jewish Jerusalem; before all flesh shall see him together; before any of his appearances, which taken together comprise the second coming of the Son of God -- before all these, there is to be a secret appearance to selected members of his Church. He will come in private to his prophet and to the apostles then living. Those who have held keys and powers and authorities in all ages from Adam to the present will also be present. And further, all the faithful members of the Church then living and all the faithful saints of all the ages past will be present. It will be the greatest congregation of faithful saints ever assembled on planet earth. It will be a sacrament meeting. It will be a day of judgment for the faithful of all the ages. And it will take place in Davies County, Missouri, at a place called Adam-ondi-Ahman. (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah*, p.578 - p.579)

4. THE LORD EXPLAINS THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS.

The D&C is filled with revealed information about the responsibilities of those who agree by covenant to participate in this latter-day work. But in the revelation given to direct the organization, the Lord focused on the basics:

The duty of the members after they are received by baptism.--The elders or priests are to have a sufficient time to expound all things concerning the church of Christ to their

understanding, previous to their partaking of the sacrament and being confirmed by the laying on of the hands of the elders, so that all things may be done in order. And the members shall manifest before the church, and also before the elders, by a godly walk and conversation, that they are worthy of it, that there may be works and faith agreeable to the holy scriptures--walking in holiness before the Lord. (D&C 20:68,69)

We are required to manifest by our godly walk and conversation that we are worthy of confirmation and of the sacrament's promise. This promise is, of course, the promise that we can have the Holy Spirit to be with us at all times. That is also the promise of the confirmation if we make our lives conform, *by a godly walk and conversation* to the patters revealed in these last days.

CONCLUSION: The humble, almost insignificant beginnings of the Church in the latter days was only surprising to those with no vision. Joseph (and no doubt others) knew of the miracles to follow. On one occasion Joseph said to a group of priesthood holders:

"Brethren, I have been very much edified and instructed in your testimonies here tonight, but I want to say to you before the Lord, that you know no more concerning the destinies of this church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother's lap. You don't comprehend it."

He continued:

"It is only a handful of priesthood you see here tonight, but this church will fill North and South America it will fill the world."

Among other things, he said:

"It will fill the Rocky Mountains. There will be tens of thousands of Latter-day Saints who will be gathered to the Rocky Mountains, and there they will open the door for the establishing of the gospel among the Lamanites, who will receive the gospel and their endowments and the blessings of God. This people will

go into the Rocky Mountains; they will there build temples to the Most High. They will raise up a posterity there, and the Latter-day Saints who dwell in these mountains will stand in the flesh until the coming of the Son of Man. The Son of Man will come to them while in the Rocky Mountains." (*Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, pp. 38,39)

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