

Remembering the Covenants Conference
Centerville, Utah
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Denver Snuffer

I actually prepared a talk and a PowerPoint and I brought my computer. I'll put it up on my website and you can read it there. I'm just going to talk for a few moments.

I've been struck by the content of what's been talked about today. I don't know how many here are descendants of Joseph Smith, Sr. or any of the children in that family, sons and daughters, but I appreciate very much the opportunity to address any who belong to that family. There was another great-great (I don't know how many generations and how many greats ought to go to it) grandson of Hyrum born today. I got a couple of pictures of him sent to me. He apparently doesn't like his picture being taken and he was making quite a face. The family expands. But as one of the Jewish leaders confronting Christ complained about and Christ responded, God is able to raise up seed anywhere, to Abraham and to the restoration. The work of God cannot be frustrated by anything that has, is, or will take place.

When Joseph Smith organized an institutional form for the restoration, that institutional form gives the opportunity for utterly compromising the restoration itself merely by corrupting the head. If you have all of the authority within the institution concentrated into the hands of a single individual then all that is required is that that single individual become evil, become corrupt, become self-serving, become ambitious, become someone who fails to retain the connection to heaven necessary in order to move things forward – hence the limitation that was put by Joseph in the letter from Liberty Jail on priesthood authority. When people desire to exercise control or compulsion, or exercise and obtain their ambitions, then they are odds with what heaven is trying to do.

The trick of the magician – if you've ever watched Penn and Teller, they try to figure out the magician's trick – is to have something going on that distracts you while something else is taking place so that the focus is always upon what the magician is trying to get you to notice rather than what is happening under the control of the magician. The way in which the restoration has unfolded since the death of Joseph and Hyrum, or more correctly the death of Hyrum and Joseph, has been rather like the magician's trick. Much of what those people who claim they understand and they can espouse to you their exegesis of scripture, their analysis of what the scriptures really mean, and their more obscure passages mean, are really like the magician's trick in getting you to focus on one thing while something else is really taking place.

God can fulfil the way in which he prophesied that the restoration will unfold in any manner but as soon as you think you've got some place to go that can be corrupted, the ambitions in this world are such that corruption most surely follows.

I don't lead anyone, and in my core I don't want to lead anyone. In my core. It is abhorrent to me to think that I have the right to preside over another soul. I want souls free. I want

them to stand on their own. I want to encourage others. I want to raise them up, if possible to raise them up above myself but I want control over no man.

When you find those with ambition, even if they start out on a good path, the thing that the powers of this world desire above all else is to get a good person for a good reason trying to achieve a good result to resort to compulsion in order to achieve it. In that very same breath in which Joseph Smith said, "You don't know me, you never knew my heart, no man knows my history," (King Follett discourse 1844) in that same breath he says his voice has always been for good to every man.

He raised an army and he marched to Missouri to liberate the saints that had been expelled and when they got there they were disbanded; they were disbanded without any violence. He had the city of Far West ready when it was under siege and he had them surrender their arms. He raised the Nauvoo Legion. At the moment that he went back to have them surrender their arms the Nauvoo Legion was a more powerful military force than the United States Army, and Joseph Smith disarmed them. He's been accused of wanting ambitious control, of being another Mohammed, of being a variety of things but Joseph Smith's heart would lay down a life, his own life, in order to protect his friends. He's been falsely accused of many things. He's been given attributes that he didn't have.

In the description that was given here today it was mentioned that Joseph turned everything over to Hyrum. Does a megalomaniac who wants to have control over others, does a megalomaniac turn the control of the church over to someone else, his brother? Joseph Smith's heart is not what people say it was or is. He was a kindly man and he sought to do good, but he didn't finish the work of the restoration.

In July of 1840 Joseph Smith gave a talk in which he was encouraging the people that believed in the revelations that had come through him to build a temple. A temple needed to be built and he made a comment that if the temple could get built and he could see it finished from its top to its completion, if he could see that work completed, then he would gladly go in peace and let his life end, if he could just accomplish that work. This was in July 1840, In January of 1841 came the revelation commanding that the temple be built. Together with a statement at the beginning of the January 1841 revelation saying, Joseph, your petition and your offering is acceptable to me and I will allow them to build a temple, and it can be built on that spot, and you'll have sufficient time to do that. But at the end of the sufficient time, then instead of blessings there will be an outpouring of cursings upon the people. And in three-and-a-half years the temple had not been completed to the second floor, and the time went out, sufficient time expired, the lives of Joseph and Hyrum were forfeit, and instead of blessings there were cursings. Well, why did Joseph, in July 1840, without a commandment from God that he knew was going to come, why did Joseph encourage the saints at that point to begin building a temple to God? Why did the commandment have to be given in January of 1841 for the temple to be built? And why were the lives of Joseph and Hyrum forfeited three-and-a-half years later when the work was still incomplete?

There were accusations about the temple committee stealing money from the temple fund. There were complaints from the mission up in Wisconsin, floating wood down the Mississippi to Nauvoo for construction of the temple, that the wood was being diverted to construct houses for the leading members in Nauvoo, and houses did get built. In fact, the Nauvoo restoration has been a testament, a testimony, to how the community diverted the effort that God commanded be spent on constructing the temple into constructing the community, and so their lives were taken.

Joseph did have a covenant and Hyrum did have a covenant, but the manner in which that covenant was to be disseminated Joseph understood required that the House of God be built, because some things do not get put outside of God's house.

We were told in a get-together in Boise, Idaho that God's people are always required to build a temple. It will serve exactly the same purpose that was intended, at the beginning of the restoration, to have been accomplished while Joseph and Hyrum were alive. To this point we do not yet have a commandment to do so but we know it is coming and we know its purpose is exactly the same. Joseph could have accomplished a great deal more. Hyrum and Joseph together could have completed the process of the restoration. It is still a great undone work.

At about the same time that Joseph gave that talk there were two letters, one written on July 25, the second one written on July 27, both of them from John C. Bennett who was the quartermaster of the militia in the state of Illinois. The first one saying he was coming to Nauvoo and that he wanted to be there with Joseph's people. The second one said he not only wanted to come but he wanted to join, to become part of Joseph's people. And both letters end with John C. Bennett, who had become the mayor of Nauvoo, saying, "Reply to this letter immediately!" Reply to this letter immediately, because John Bennett was a hasty man and an ambitious man and a corrupt man.

And when it comes to the construction of Zion God has said in revelation it cannot be done in haste because haste brings pestilence. And what is pestilential is not just bugs and rodents, it is confusion. We have a season of peace and we have a season of prosperity, and we have an opportunity in which we might be able to accomplish something with nothing more than the same thing that Joseph Smith was talking about in July of 1840. But when a command is given and sufficient time is accorded and the clock begins to run, then the tendency is to move quickly, like John Bennett. Everything is in a hurry. When you have a season of peace upon you and an opportunity to reflect upon what went wrong with the restoration at the beginning, and we have again the opportunity established by the word of the Lord that was read to and accepted by, for the first time in the restoration, a Covenant to accept the obligations that were devolving upon us in the restoration, and we have an opportunity to prepare and to do something. We delay, we hesitate, and we squander the opportunity, ultimately at our peril.

I don't care how much you think you know about what God is up to, I guarantee you that unless God has shown it to you plainly as He has done to Joseph at the beginning, you're not going to figure out what God is up to. There's a reason for that. If you could figure out what

God is going to do and where and when and how, then the adversary could prevent that work from being accomplished. It is precisely because God keeps his secrets and entrusts them carefully and guardedly that the work of God cannot be frustrated and the covenants will be fulfilled, and the prophecies will be vindicated, and what was offered through Joseph will, in fact, be accomplished.

We have an opportunity, if we will avail ourselves of it, at a time of peace and prosperity, to do something to prepare in order to have that day come upon us with adequate preparation having been made in advance.

Because the institution could be corrupted and because the institution began to inflate its role. You see, at the beginning the institution was the creature of the authority of the prophet. It did not own and control the prophet, but it was subordinate to that man who could declare what the mind of God was to them. Over time the institution arrogated, that is, in its arrogance assumed that it could control even the right to declare the mind of God. And so the institution puts people in a role to sit in the temple of God as if they were God, to declare to the people what things ought or needed to be done, and has amassed at this point billions of dollars in wealth with no Zion, hundreds of billions of dollars in property, with no ability to reconnect anyone through Covenants to the Fathers to anyone other than the dead who reside in hell looking for redemption from the grave. That was not the plan at the beginning. That was not the objective of the restoration. Billions of dollars have been accumulated in the pursuit of the damnation of the souls of men, damnation meaning hedging up the way so that they cannot progress. Billions of dollars!

And where is the restoration precisely? How much closer are we now to having the covenants fulfilled, the rights vindicated, the opportunity to enter into sacred space where heaven and earth and the afterlife commune together in the process of redeeming the earth itself? There will be two of these locations on the earth before the Lord returns. One will be called Zion and one will be at Jerusalem. And in the Covenant things were set in motion that will vindicate those promises. Not all of what is happening to do that can be known publicly. It's not necessary that it be known but there are things taking place, no matter how diminutive it may seem. God will vindicate His words.

When Joseph Smith said, "You don't know me, you never knew me, you never knew my heart," he was lamenting the fact that it's impossible, it's impossible to know what it was that Joseph was tasked to accomplish unless you know what it was that God showed him and tasked him to accomplish. All of the biographers, all of the people that write their commentaries, all of the friends, all of the foes, everyone that has written, from Jan Shipp to Philastus Hurlbut to D. Michael Quinn, all of them fail to occupy the space that uniquely identified who and what Joseph Smith was. Joseph Smith stood in a position in which heaven was open and the future of the world was unfolded. And a task had to be done and a job was given to him. And at times Joseph was so overwhelmed by the enormity of the task to be performed that he couldn't find words to describe it.

Harold Bloom, the Humanities professor at Yale University, gives a great deal of credit to Joseph Smith, calling him a hermeticist and a modern cabalist. He's grasping a little

something of what was going on. The hermetic tradition, the cabalist tradition, that's trying to search into the hidden mysteries that the world is unworthy to receive. Joseph Smith was tasked with the responsibility to take all of that, to embody it into something that would reconnect heaven and earth, and it required a temple in order for him to accomplish that work. He gave his life and his brother forfeited his life in an effort to support that very end. He died for the benefit of the restoration. He died for the benefit of the heirs of the restoration. He died for our benefit. It's of some terrible significance that the last in the line who held the office of Patriarch in the LDS Church was made emeritus and allowed to die and the office die with it, because it stands as a hallmark in the rejection of the restoration itself by the institution.

Don't be reading into it what I'm saying that I dislike or condemn the LDS Church. The LDS Church just is. It's like the Community of Christ; it's like the Remnant Church. There are a lot of good people that belong to these various institutions who are very trusting of what the institutions are doing. The leaders of these institutions I'm fairly certain don't intend to do evil but the result is evil, and all of the good intentions notwithstanding. Where, where is the fulfilment of the promise? Amassing wealth and waiting is not going to achieve any good end. Repentance, baptism, and finding yourself accountable directly to God, that's where the work of the restoration is going to continue. As far as the scriptures inform us, the only thing that Enoch claimed for himself was the role of being a teacher. Melchizedek was given the praise of being called a King and a Priest, new name given to him, but his role was that of a preacher of righteousness.

There's this episode of The Simpsons where Bart has made a long-distance collect phone call to Australia and inflicted some family in Australia with a huge long-distance phone bill. The guy in Australia calls Homer to complain about his phone bill and Bart was laughing at him. The Aussie says, "Oh yeah? I'm going to complain to the prime minister!" and he hangs the phone up, opens up the window and yells out to this pond where there's a guy on an inner tube. He yells, "Prime minister!" And the prime minister responds because that's the way The Simpsons mock the government of Australia.

The fact of the matter is that King Benjamin, in his description of how he'd served his people, described his service exactly like The Simpsons portray the prime minister of Australia. King Benjamin, who took no money for his support. King Benjamin, who labored by his own hand for his own support so he wouldn't be a burden on his people. King Benjamin, who took up the sword in defense of his people and put his life in jeopardy for the protection of his people. King Benjamin, the commoner. King Benjamin, the servant. King Benjamin, who mirrored our Lord. Some claim to have great priestly authority, and it all derives from the carpenter, laborer, foot washer who said,

"My kingdom is not of this world." [John 18:36]

We're not going to arrive where we need to arrive if we perceive ourselves as unequal, if we think of ourselves as greater and lesser, if we don't think of ourselves as simply common servants, inadequate as we may be, to a Lord who loved and sacrificed Himself for our redemption. He is worthy. We can do our best and we can make a lot of mistakes along

the way. Joseph did his best and it just didn't work out. But what would have happened if the people, in July of 1840 when no commandment had yet been given, rose up and with alacrity decided that they were going to labor for the accomplishment of the task that Joseph was telling them was coming? What would have happened had the money raised and donated for the temple not been diverted by the temple committee to their own purposes? What would have happened if the lumber sent down from the Wisconsin mission been used for the construction of the temple rather than being diverted for the homes of the leading citizens? What would have happened if instead of God requiring yanking on the reins to pull the bit in the mouth of the horse of the restoration, what would have happened if all that was needed was for the reins to be lightly put on the neck of the horse of the restoration, to guide it where it needed to go? Horses are so sensitive that when a fly lands on their skin, they can twitch to remove it. The people of the restoration are nowhere near as sensitive to what God would have them do, then or now, as is a horse.

Well, I want to end on time. I'll publish the talk that I prepared. It will be on my website.

It was a pretty good talk, but you can read it for yourself.

I thought if I was going to add anything to what was said previously today that I really needed to say this: Joseph was not understood, and Joseph probably can't be understood unless you have that same space to occupy with the same challenge. Given the opportunity to accomplish what the work of the Restoration is intended to result in, I would hope that we would cease from our jealousies and our ambition, our contention, our desire for one-upmanship, our desire to prove our individual greatness - and realize that none of us are ever going to be very good servants. But we're supposed to be serving the perfect Master, and if we'll serve him faithfully instead of our own agenda, he can lead us home.

He will lead some few home. But I hope it's not with the same sort of miserable, inadequate, self-serving distractions that had to be overcome at the beginning. I hope we can take it a bit more seriously and be a bit more sensitive when the Lord is encouraging us in a way, rather than requiring that He command and demand us to go in a way. Commandments are often the things that produce condemnation. Encouragement and invitation is almost always the thing that produces blessing. I hope there will one day be a blessed people.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.