

Comments at the Joseph Smith Restoration Conference

Boise, ID

June 8, 2019

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Clearly—

I don't know, can you hear me? Is this mic good?

Clearly, most of you are not familiar with the writings of Hunter S. Thompson, or you would have been a little surprised by him being quoted here: the father of “Gonzo journalism” and the author of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*—a laugh-out-loud funny, but obscene, book. [Audience laughter]

I've enjoyed every talk that has been given today:

- The first one was the recorded testimony of Tony Davis, who essentially made a plea for us to unite, which has been echoed then in every talk that has been given at the conference this year. This is the second year of this conference. And I have to tell you, last year it felt like we were trying to pull into different camps, and this year it feels very much like we're all trying to pull into one camp. In just one year of reflecting on this subject—remarkable differences. I would suggest all of you go listen to the talks last conference, and then listen again to this conference. There has been **meaningful** progress that has been made.

(Jeremy, you dropped something when you pulled your... Yeah, he's good.)

- I learned something from Neil Simon's talk.
- I noted the omission of Jeremy Hoop's musical number from the schedule. I don't know if that's an answer to prayer—his or ours. [Audience laughter]
- I thought Michael Kelly's comments were, to me, very insightful—I do not know a lot about the Church of Christ and the Temple Lot, and I'm interested now to know if the view expressed by Michael Kelley is a widespread view within that community, or it's his conclusion as a result of the tension that you feel from trying to parse through Mormon history. And I intend to investigate that after today.
- I thought James McKay's reminder about the vigor of the Book of Mormon as a tool for conversion was important.
- Jeremy's talk (delivered much too fast because of the time constraints) contained fabulous information that everyone ought to go back and listen to and look at. [Speaking to Jeremy:] Was that in writing? If it is, can you put the written copy out? That was getting a drink with a fire hose. [Audience laughter]
- Tausha's “Time to Unify the Branches” was wonderful.
- The music “Come Thou Font”—that song gets to me.
- And Adrian's “Why We Need to be Wrong” was terrific.

I want to go to the Book of Mormon, and I want to look at what it says **as if** the Book of Mormon was only written **to address us, to address you**, to speak to people who not only have become believers in the Book of Mormon but who have **read** and are **reading** the Book of Mormon. It does not make much sense to think of the Book of Mormon as a text that's designed to tell you, "Hey, you're okay, but everyone else is screwed up." It makes a whole lot more sense to read the Book of Mormon as if it's saying, "I—God—would really like to save you. But **you** are **so** riddled with error, you are **so** riddled with false tradition, you are **so** riddled with wrong ideas that I'm gonna give you a text in the **desperate hope** that you might take it seriously enough that it **might bring** you a little closer to Me. To the extent that you will accept it faithfully and fully, it will bring you a **lot** closer to Me." But **I'm begging you—**

Please give heed to these words, because God wants to bring you, as someone that takes the book seriously, closer to Him.

It was in the same year that the Book of Mormon had been published, a church had been organized (although all it was, was locally gathered believers in a fellowship; no—absolutely no—hierarchy). They held elections to approve people to hold the position of Elder, but that didn't mean anything other than they were elected to a position of Elder. Right now, in any branch of any of the various iterations of the Restoration, people could get together and elect a woman to be an Elder. There's nothing that would prevent that, because the position is not the same thing as priesthood. You do not have to hold priesthood to hold office. You do not have to hold anything but an election to hold an office—in any of the branches. There is no such thing as the "priesthood of Elder"; there is only an office that you can occupy by being elected. You could elect a man to be a Relief Society president if you got enough votes for it. That doesn't mean that he is a **female**; it means that he is the president of the Relief Society. The same is true of a Sunday School president. There's no such thing as a priesthood office called "Sunday School president," but there's an office within an organization. Most of what we assume to be "priesthood" is simply an **office**.

For many years in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the president of that organization, over a two-decade period, took the position that no one needed to have the priesthood conferred upon them. According to Hebrew J. Grant, it was enough simply to set them apart into an office of the Church. And so, for a period of two decades, what people received was ordination (or conferral) of an office within an organization.

Well, there are a lot of things that are peculiar about the history of the various Restoration movements that ought to raise serious questions in your mind about whether or not the traditions of your fathers that have come down to **you really** represent a conferral or a conveyance of what the Restoration commenced as and has been delivered in continuity; that is preserved, intact, true—and your salvation can be gambled on it.

That first year after the Church existed, after the Book of Mormon had been printed, **speaking to** a revelation given to two members that had been called to the ministry in October of 1830, the Lord said this:

*"My vineyard has become corrupted every whit, and there is none which does good, save it is a few, and **they** do err in many instances because of priestcrafts, **all** having corrupt minds"* (T&C 16:1, emphasis added)(D&C 33:4)

Okay? It didn't say, "Fortunate for you two, you belong to a true branch." [Audience laughter] It didn't say, "Now I'm gonna tell you about all those folks out there who were in a state of rapid decomposition, hell-bent for the nether regions of darkness in the afterlife." He's talking to **them** about **them** and everyone else. "*My vineyard has become corrupted every whit, ...there is none which does good, save it [be] a few, and **they** do err in many instances because of priestcrafts, all having corrupt minds"* (ibid). An enemy has snuck in and corrupted your mind—every one of you. You all possess a corrupted mind.

Well, if that weren't good enough to set things on the right course, in September of 1832, not quite two years later (little over a year and a half), another revelation is given. And this one is **specifically** talking to **everyone who**, between 1830 and September of 1832, had become converted/had accepted the Book of Mormon/had been baptized/had joined the organization of a church that existed at that point. So now, you cannot escape these words because they're addressed to the folks from whom **all of you**, one way or another, derive **your tradition**. So these are those folks from whom **you** spring as a believer:

"Your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received, which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation" (T&C 82:20)(D&C 84:54)

We didn't have branches back then. We didn't have Communities of Christ versus LDS versus FLDS versus—

It is one. It's still one; we don't have any break-offs. So this is the **trunk** from which you all spring. The **whole Church**, all of you, the **whole** of this is under condemnation.

*"And this condemnation rests upon the children of Zion, even all, and they shall **remain** under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, **even the Book of Mormon**, and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to **say** but to **do** according to that which I have written, that they may bring forth **fruit** meet for their Father's kingdom. Otherwise, there remains a scourge and a judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion, for shall the children of the kingdom pollute my holy land? Verily, ...I say unto you, **nay**."* (T&C 82:20, emphasis added)(D&C 84:56-59)

Okay? You're not gonna be allowed to do that. So you're not gonna get possession of a Holy Land because He's not gonna allow you to pollute it. Because at this point, with our various traditions, if we were to go occupy that land it would become **instantly** polluted because of what we bring with us, because we are not of one heart, we are not of one mind; and therefore, we can't help but pollute it.

The condemnation that we received, we have learned for *not only to say but to do according to that which I have written* did not mean solely that they were **saying** but not **doing**, it meant that they **weren't even saying** what the Lord had written. Hence, the need to go back, repent, and redo the scriptures from the ground up. Hence, the need for the scriptures.info website that you referred to because the scriptures of all the various groups have been corrupted. And all of us remain under condemnation until we stop “not saying” according to what He'd written, and then we begin to **do** according to what He has written. (That project will culminate in the publication of leather-bound versions of those scriptures within the next few months.)

Well, with that introduction, then—

[Speaking about the AV technology on the podium] You see, I'm afraid I'm gonna touch this, and then some slide is gonna jump up on the screen, and then we'll all be distracted because if there's a screen to watch—well, we've been conditioned. [Audience laughter]

Okay, so let me then read from the Book of Mormon with that assumption in mind that we began with—that this is talking **to you about you**; to you about your congregation, your denomination, your organization; to you about the whole of this. Okay? And I hope it makes you squirm.

*"He [this is talking about the Lord: **He**] commandeth that there shall be **no priestcrafts**; for behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and **set themselves up** for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world, but they seek not the welfare of Zion. Behold, the Lord hath **forbidden** this thing; wherefore, the Lord...hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love. And except they should have charity, they were **nothing**; wherefore, if they should have **charity**, they would not suffer the laborer in Zion to perish. But the laborer in Zion shall labor **for Zion**, for if they labor for money, they shall perish."* (2 Nephi 11:17 RE, emphasis added)(2Nephi 26:29)

So that's the first part of this. The only reason we should practice our religion is to **sacrifice** for the bringing about of Zion. We're not to be remunerated. We're not to be compensated. If we're not sacrificing, we cannot develop faith. Therefore, sacrifice for your religion is mandatory.

*"And again the Lord hath commanded that men should not murder, that they should not **lie** (ibid)[great comments about lying made today in Jeremy's talk]*

*...that they should not **steal**, that they should not **take the name of the Lord their God in vain** (ibid).*

That doesn't mean swearing; that means testifying to something as the Lord's doctrine or teaching when it is, in fact, not His and attributing it to Him— that's taking the name of God in vain.

*...that they should not **envy**, that they should not have **malice** (ibid)—envy, malice are particularly relevant when you consider how the various Restoration branches have **regarded** one another, have **condemned** one another, have **competed** with one another, have **failed to recognize the goodness that exists within each body** of the Restoration congregations.*

...that they should not contend one with another (ibid).

That's the only thing that has been happening since the various factions have broken up into the “Rigdonites” and the “Josephites” and the “Brighamites” and the “Bickertonites” and the “Strangeites” and the “Hedrickites” and “What's-that-guy-in-jail-ites.”

*...that they should not contend...with [one] another, that they should not commit whoredoms, ...that they should do **none** of these things. For whoso doeth them shall **perish** (ibid)—(2Nephi 26:32)*

“Whoso doeth **them**”—any of them. We’re contending with one another? It’ll perish.

*...for **none of these iniquities come of the Lord**. For he doeth that which is good among the children of men, and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men. And he inviteth them **all** to come unto him and partake of his goodness, and he denieth none that come unto him (ibid)(2Nephi 26:33)*

This is the verse that we got read earlier today by Neil Simons. These are the words that precede what he was talking about—about the absence of divisions.

*...he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen, and all are alike unto God, both Jew and gentile. But behold, in the last days, or in the days of the gentiles, yea, behold, all the nations of the gentiles, and also the Jews, both those who shall **come upon this land** and those who shall be upon other lands, yea, even upon all the lands of the earth, behold, **they will be drunken with iniquity** and all manner of abominations. (Ibid, vs. 17-18 RE, emphasis added)(2Nephi 26:33 & 2Nephi 27:1)*

Just so you know, when these words were written as part of Nephi's valedictory address talking to those who would read the Book of Mormon, he wants it really clear that he's including within this description the Gentiles who shall come upon this, the American land, or **you—you** who have a copy of this book to read.

Nephi is trying to summarize what he would like us to get out of his effort in summarizing the vision that he had that he was forbidden from writing; but others had written about the same thing, and so he co-opted the words of Isaiah, put them into his book as **his** testimony—and so that we understood that he was applying the words of Isaiah with his own (Nephi's message), he gives his valedictory summary of his text in the closing chapters of Second Nephi. This (what I just read and what I'm about to read) comes from that closing

summary by Nephi of what he would like the Gentiles to **get** out of this, to **understand** out of his message:

*"For it shall come to pass in that day [when the Book of Mormon comes forward], ...the churches which are built up, and not unto the Lord, when...one shall say unto the other, Behold, I, I am the Lord's — and the other shall say, **I, I am the Lord's**, — and thus shall everyone say that hath built up churches and **not** unto the Lord." (2 Nephi 12:1 RE, emphasis added)(2Nephi 28:3)*

I don't have a church. The one I was loyal to kicked me out because I was more loyal to a truthful history than to fairytales. I was still willing to belong to and support with my tithes and with my attendance, but I did not think it had a credible **claim** to be the Lord's—**too many** departures, **too many** failures, **too many** lies, **too many** plain errors. I thought it had value—I think every branch of the Restoration has value, but the Book of Mormon has greater value than **any** of them, greater value than **all** of them collectively.

*"And they shall contend one with another, and their **priests** shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with **their learning**, and deny the holy ghost which giveth utterance. And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel. And they say unto the people, Hearken unto us and hear ye our precept, for behold, there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men." (Ibid, emphasis added)(2Nephi 28:4-5)*

Hands were laid on heads. Voilá! [Audience laughter] You are a priest! Not just a priest—a **Melchizedek** priest. And Melchizedek may have done something that was great, but don't worry about it, kid—you're just as great. [Audience laughter]

*"Because of pride, and because of **false teachers**, and **false doctrine[s]**, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride, they are puffed up. They rob the poor because of their fine sanctuaries; they rob the poor because of their fine clothing, and they persecute the meek and the poor in heart because in their pride they are puffed up. They wear stiff necks and high heads..."(Ibid, vs. 2, emphasis added)(2Nephi 28:12-14)*

See "stiff necks" means you do not bow in reverence to God's will; you've got another agenda rather than God's, so your neck is stiff because you won't bow to Him. And "high heads" means you're proud of what you know. It's the point Adrian made today: we need to realize, no matter how much we think we know, none of us know that much. None of us ought to hold our heads high. All of us ought to be willing to become as a little child and heed and hearken to the holy ghost that giveth utterance. And what is the most often utterance given by the holy ghost?

"Repent. Repent, forsake your false ideas, forsake your false traditions, return to Me."

"They wear stiff necks and high heads, yea, and because of pride, and wickedness, and abominations" (ibid)—

You know, “abominations” is a terrible word; it just sounds bad. But it means that what you're doing is you're celebrating something false as a religious sacrament—that you're treating something that isn't God's (or even approved by Him) as His. It's abominable. It's blasphemy. It's repugnant to God, and it ought to be repugnant to us.

C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *Mere Christianity*. We ought to get back to the **mereness** of the Restoration, because in its mereness, the Restoration asks us to repent, be baptized, read the words that we get in the Book of Mormon, and then search for and find that God who caused the Restoration to come about to fulfill His purposes. And His purpose is to save us.

...abominations, and whoredoms, they have all gone astray, save it be a few who are the humble followers of Christ (ibid). This sounds very much like that revelation given to the missionaries being sent out during that first year of the Church, *they have all gone astray*—now the words here are slightly different:

*"They have all gone astray, save it be a few who are the humble followers of Christ. Nevertheless, **they** are led, that in many instances **they** do err because they are taught by the precepts of men. O the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up in the pride of their hearts, and all [they that] preach false doctrines, and all [they that] commit whoredoms and pervert the right way of the Lord, **Woe, woe, woe** be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell."* (Ibid, vs. 2-3, emphasis added)(2Nephi 28:14-15)

“Woe, woe, woe” is a three-fold condemnation. You can be condemned with one “woe” or with two, but when you're condemned with three “woes,” that follows you on into what comes next. You just don't want to wind up there, particularly when you have the means in your hands to understand how to avoid these kinds of errors and this kind of condemnation.

Well, Michael Kelly this morning referred to a statement by Paul in his letter to the Galatians:

*"Though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:2 RE)
(Galatians 1:8)*

What is that gospel? See, it's almost as if when Christ set up and called twelve apostles to be the ministers He sent into the world to preach repentance unto the world, whom He called and whom He ordained—it's almost as if one of the very first acts of the Lord was to call Paul **outside** of the organization He had set up, **outside** of the group that He had authorized, **outside** of the group that He had ordained. Why would the Lord call Paul on the road to Damascus and give to him a dispensation of the gospel when there was already an **existing** dispensation of the gospel in the hands of the twelve who had been with Him

all throughout His ministry? It's almost as if the Lord wanted to make the point from the outset:

Don't ever assume you can rely on a structure.

God will call whom He will call, and Christ made that point with Paul. And so when Paul writes to the Galatians, "Let anyone that preaches a different gospel than the one I've delivered to you be accursed," we ought to ask ourselves, "Well, what then is the gospel that Paul preaches?" It's a gospel founded upon a man who can bear witness and testimony, like the other twelve could, that Jesus Christ was the resurrected Lord who came and sacrificed, died and rose from the dead, who will draw all men to Him. And Paul knew that.

That gospel—that same God who did something very similar with Joseph Smith, who came and delivered to him a dispensation of the gospel in which Joseph could testify—that Lord (who lived, who died, and who rose again) lives and testifies and is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His gospel is unchanging; His act doesn't change. That gospel of ascension, in which men are brought up unto Him—

Amos foretold this:

(And we read these words as if they applied during a 1700/1800 year hiatus between the death of Christ and His Apostles and the opening of the heavens to Joseph Smith. We don't read these words as if anything like this began **again** at the death of Joseph and Hyrum. But I want you to consider that these words may be a description of what began immediately upon the death of Joseph and Hyrum.)

*"Behold, the days come, [saith] the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land — not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from...north even to the east. They shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord and **shall not find it.**" (Amos 1:27 RE, emphasis added)(Amos 8:11)*

Oh, you'll find plenty of

- *lo hear's* and *lo there's*;
- *I, I am the Lord's*;
- *God hath **finished** his work* and give His authority unto me—

You'll find plenty of those. You'll find plenty of preaching involving the traditions of fathers—but you also find a famine. Then, Micah said:

"Then shall the seers be ashamed and the diviners confounded. Yea, they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer of God... The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money. Yet will they lean upon the Lord and say, Is not the Lord among us? No[ne] evil can come upon us." (Micah 1:8 RE)(Michah 3:7)

Evil will come upon them, because Zion is what the Lord intends to preserve. We should be desperately seeking for that.

Isaiah said:

"The land shall be utterly emptied and utterly spoiled, for the Lord ha[th] spoken this word. The earth mourn[eth] and fade[th] away; the world languishe[th] and fade[th] away; the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance[s], broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore ha[th] the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate; therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left." (Isaiah 7:1 RE)(Isaiah 24:3)

Well, that's coming.

Look, whenever the Lord sets about to do a work, vessels are broken, traditions are discarded. **Reform may work to splinter Catholicism, but reform does not work to repair a restoration.** It doesn't, and it can't. You either need a restoration or you're just messing with an old bag that can't take a new patch.

Christ said—

(This was in a conversation with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was one of the Sanhedrin. He was a member of the Seventy, one of the "presiding authorities"; one of those who could speak with authority, with the confidence that he occupied a position approved by God—a governor in the land.)

Jesus told him, "You're gonna have to get baptized." And Nicodemus, who'd already been baptized—

See, when they came and they questioned John's baptism, they didn't question **baptism**; they questioned the authority of John **to baptize**, because everyone was being baptized. And Nicodemus, who'd been baptized, came to Christ; and Christ told him, "You gotta be baptized again." And Nicodemus' reaction was, "Why do I gotta go do that? I mean, that seems redundant." And Christ's answer to him is the same answer that has to be given to everyone, in every branch, at any time when restoration begins again:

"No man also sew[eth] a piece of new cloth on an old garment, else the new piece that fille[th] it up take[th] away from the old and the rent is made worse [the tear]. And no man put[teth] new wine [in] old bottles, else the new wine doe[th] burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled and the bottles will be marred. But new wine must be put [in] new bottles." (Mark 2-3 RE)(Mark 2:21)

In other words, any time a restoration begins anew, there has to be baptism again because you have to acknowledge and accept the fact that God speaks again.

Well, as was mentioned, a new set of scriptures has begun the process of repenting and returning. And those new scriptures are not the only thing that is underway. In addition, rebaptism... it doesn't—

You're not joining an organization; we have no organization to join. The problem with all the Restoration splinters is that they're competing with one another. We have no interest in providing a competing organization. We offer baptism. We accept the Book of Mormon—not just as a text, but we accept the Book of Mormon as a covenant.

The early Saints voted to accept Lectures on Faith. They voted to accept the revelations that were found in the Doctrine and Covenants. They never accepted the Book of Mormon, either as a volume of scripture (they just assumed it), and they certainly never accepted the Book of Mormon as a covenant.

In an effort to undo the condemnation that was given in September of 1832, we've gone back, we've recovered the scriptures as accurately as it is possible to do so today—not only to **say** what the Lord wanted said as accurately as possible, but also to **do** according to that which is written. Once it is **said** correctly, the next thing is to **do** it.

And so baptism is being offered anew—rebaptism. Most of the baptisms you read about in the Book of Mormon are rebaptisms. They'd already been baptized once before, but they had to repent and return and be rebaptized. All those people that Alma went out in the wilderness and baptized at the waters of Mormon—those were all rebaptisms. All the great accounts of conversion in the Book of Mormon are reconversions/rebaptisms, with the exception of recovering some particularly militant apostates who had not practiced in faithfulness the religion that they had been given at the outset.

Look, I hope this conference continues. If as much a difference in spirit can occupy this conference next year as is different from last year to this, then we really are headed towards a greater unity. Tausha lamented all the frustrations she had in trying to get this thing put together. [Speaking to Tausha] Oh, you worry too much; it's that red hair. You just leave it alone. If you're inspired to do it, when it happens, it'll take care of itself, as it has today.

What I saw today (compared to last year) is progress. It's astonishing. It's wonderful. And I feel closer to all of those who have spoken from the various traditions today. I hope we can grow closer again from now until the next of these. And I hope that there is a next of these.

Thank you.