

Authority, Keys, and Kingdom

Sandy, UT

July 14, 2019

Denver C. Snuffer, Jr.

DENVER: See, when they told me about the theme of this conference, I thought, “Well, it’s right down her alley—Why would I talk about that when she spent years thinking about the very topic?” So I’m not going to talk about that; she covered the subject, and I’m gonna talk about something else.

There are three ideas that create a lot of problems, a lot of tension, a lot of conflict and discussion—and I want to address those three subjects here with you today: Authority, Keys, and the Kingdom of God.

On the subject of “authority,” the scriptures draw a contrast between two kinds of authority. One kind involves preaching, teaching, or statements holding self-evident or compelling truth that convicts or convinces the hearers of the truth. There are some examples of this.

Matthew 3:49 (RE): *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings with his disciples, the people were astonished at his teachings, for he taught them as one having authority from God and not as having authority from the scribes. **The authority was resident inside the message**—didn't have to be borrowed from somewhere, didn't require a badge, didn't require a collar, didn't require a mitre; it simply held compelling truth that, in the ears of the listener, convicted them.*

When they asked Jesus where He got authority from, they might just as well have posed the question, “How do you preach with such persuasive conviction?” Because **Christ had moral authority**. It was that same moral authority that caused the guards—who came at night to arrest Him in Gethsemane with their swords and with their armaments—to stumble backwards and fall down when He identified Himself, “I am the man” (see Testimony of St. John 11:2). This is the **prophetic form of authority**.

Another form of authority involves the right to exercise control or demand obedience that is obeyed because of fear of the one holding that authority. There are examples of that in scripture. *Jesus called them and said, You know that the princes of the gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them* (Matthew 10:3 RE). He's explaining to His disciples another form of authority.

The Apostle Paul held this second kind of authority before his conversion. He said: *And many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them* (Acts 12:40 RE). This kind of authority is a **priestly form of authority**.

Priests deal with rites, ordinances, commandments, and procedures. This **durable** approach to preserving a belief system allows a dispensation of the gospel to continue long after the prophetic founder has died. Moses, for example, established a system of rites and observances that then became the religious fare of priests who perpetuated the system from the time of Moses until the coming of Jesus Christ.

Prophets deal with God and angels. They receive new insight, promises, and covenants. Their conduct can even appear to violate the tradition of the religion they follow, but that is only because they are not bound to the **tradition** as practiced by the priests. Instead, they have penetrated into the underlying meaning the original power—the **purpose** of the rites. They expressed the **original view from heaven** that motivated the founding prophet.

The *prophetic* form is rarely present, even among the people of God. It comes to restore and refresh, to call to repentance, and to move God's work along. The *priestly* operates for centuries trying to perpetuate the founding prophet's restoration, but once the religion falls exclusively into the hands of the priests, traditions always creep in that stray from the original and keep **forms** intact without maintaining the spiritual substance.

It's been the history of God's people that those who are raised at a time of only the *priestly* form will **always** assume they are guided by God's messengers holding God's authority, and therefore, the *prophetic* is alien to their thinking. This is the condition Nephi foretold would happen after the Book of Mormon came forth.

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. Behold, hearken ye unto my precept. (2 Nephi 12:1 RE)

Nephi teaches: Believers in our day will eventually choose the *priestly* over the *prophetic*. But Nephi counsels us to, instead, always choose the *prophetic* over the *priestly*. People accept priestly authority over the prophetic word of God because of false traditions. Those who arrive late at the scene in the generation after God's voice has become quiet, then start traditions to explain away that silence. Generations that follow them do not even **notice** *there is no God today* **because** *he hath given his power unto men* (ibid).

In the present circumstances of the Restoration, when the priestly authorities speak, **all** of the Restoration traditions (from the LDS to the FLDS), claim **that is** the voice of God. The tradition of priestly authority in Christ's day justified the guard in striking Jesus.

*The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spoke openly to the world. I ever taught in the synagogue and in the temple where the Jews always assemble, and in secret have I said nothing. Why do you ask me? Ask **them** who heard me what I have said unto them. Behold, they know what I [have] said. And when he had thus spoken, [behold,] one of the officers who stood by*

*struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, **Do you answer the high priest so?** Jesus answered him, *If I have spoken evil, bear witness of...evil, but if well, [then] why do you smite me?* (John 10:4 RE, emphasis added)*

The officer was so subject to the priestly tradition that he was only able to conceive of the high priest as God's representative. It made him blind to the Son of God because he could not imagine something greater than the established and trusted priestly tradition. It was that same priestly tradition that made Ananias think he had the **right** to have the Apostle Paul struck on the mouth for testifying of Christ. Ananias, no doubt, thought of himself as the authorized and empowered priest who spoke for God. Culturally, and according to their traditions, Ananias was correct.

*On the next day, because he desired to have known with certainty why he was accused of the Jews, he commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them. And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by...to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite **you**, you whitewashed wall, for do you sit to judge me after the law, and command that I be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by [him], **Do you revile God's high priest?** (John 12:20 RE, emphasis added)*

Ananias was defending his **role** and his **office**. He was the anointed high priest and, therefore, believed he deserved, even required, respect. He believed that if you disrespect the high priest of God, then you likewise disrespect God. The officers who received this command likewise thought everything was as it should be—Paul had no right to disrupt the priestly tradition. But the priestly tradition must always give way to the prophetic. The priestly tradition has **no right** to judge the prophetic, but the prophetic has **every right**, and invariably the **duty**, to judge the priestly.

Then there is the concept of “keys.” The best way to conceive of a “key” is as knowledge or understanding; it means something that unlocks the hidden truths you did not previously comprehend. A new, true concept that acts like a catalyst to solidify an idea that eluded you is a “key.” When the term “eternal punishment” was defined as God's punishment (because God is eternal, and punishment for Him is “eternal punishment”), we had a new key given to us.

Prophets hold keys because they unlock understanding. *And this greater Priesthood administers the gospel and holds the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God* (T&C 82:12).

This, therefore, is the sealing and binding power, and in one sense of the word the keys of the kingdom, which consists in the key of knowledge (T&C 151:12).

And then we have in Proverbs: *It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings to search out a matter* (Proverbs 4:1 RE). It's an important thought; we'll return to that when we get to the Kingdom of God.

Joseph Smith taught, "Salvation cannot come without revelation; it is in vain for anyone to minister without it" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith [TPJS hereafter]*, p.160). Joseph taught, "Where there is a prophet, a priest, or a righteous man unto whom God gives his oracle's; there is the kingdom of God and where the oracles of God are not, there the kingdom of God is not" (*TPJS*, p. 272). Joseph Smith could ask and get an answer from God. Because of this, he held the keys of the kingdom—**because God presided**. God is the King of His kingdom. When His voice is silent, you have **no kingdom** because **the King is not speaking**. When we cannot have an answer from God, there is no Kingdom of God—because the King's voice is silent.

A key concept is one that solves the riddle, answers the question, or clears up the controversy. A key removes ignorance. When God explains something to improve man's understanding, He provides us keys or knowledge.

The Book of Mormon is filled with keys, including giving us answers to:

- who (at least one of) the other sheep were that Christ mentioned to His disciples in Jerusalem. When you explore that topic and you go into the closing comments of Nephi, you find a bit more about the other sheep because they've been divided, they've kept records, and they will be visited. When you go to the allegory in Jacob chapter 5 (LE; see also Jacob 3 RE), you learn yet more about the other sheep and how the vineyard has been populated with His sheep worldwide.
- One of the other keys of the Book of Mormon is what Christ did following His ascension into heaven. That same Jesus—two angels standing by—"that same Jesus whom you saw ascend unto heaven, shall in likewise return" (paraphrase, see Acts 1:3 RE). Well, He did that; He's gonna do it in glory to judge the world in the future, but He did that again in order to visit with the Nephites—because the description of the ascension to the Nephites in Third Nephi mirrors the description of the ascension in the book of Acts. It's symmetrical.
- Book of Mormon has keys to tell us what happened to other Israelites who were led away from Jerusalem.
- It explains and defines what it means to be redeemed from the fall.
- It explains and clarifies—in a way that the entire Christian and Jewish world could never understand—how pre-Babylonian Judaism really was practiced.
- It explains and clarifies that many Israelites were divided from the land of Jerusalem and continued as organized bodies in scattered parts of the world.
- It explains that many prophets wrote scriptures that we know nothing about.
- It tells us and promises that a great body of scripture exists, which God intends to gather into one.

There are many other keys or insights that have been kept from our knowledge, and the Book of Mormon reveals **some** of them.

“Keys” and the “Kingdom of God” are necessarily linked together. Because Samuel could obtain the voice of God, Samuel held the keys of the Kingdom of God. When the people of Israel demanded a mortal king, God explained to Samuel what their request really meant.

But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Listen unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. (1 Samuel 4:2 RE)

Reigning is what a king does. Reigning is what God, through Samuel, was doing for the people of Israel. They were rejecting their Heavenly King because they wanted a mortal king in His stead.

According to all the works which they have done, since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, in which they have forsaken me and served other gods, so do they also unto you. Now therefore listen unto their voice. Nevertheless, yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. (ibid.)

Now I want you to listen carefully to what Samuel does with that commission to warn the people about what happens when you displace God as the king, and you put a man in the place of God. What will happen to you:

*This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them for himself, for his chariots and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands and captains over fift[y], and will set them to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be compounders, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them [un]to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed [out] of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants. And he will take your menservants and your maidservants, and your **best young men**, and your asses, and put them to **his** work. [And] he will take the tenth of your sheep, and you shall be his servants. And you shall cry out in that day because of your king whom you shall have chosen you, and **the Lord will not hear you in that day.** (1 Samuel 4:3 RE, emphasis added)*

This is how the Kingdom of God is evicted from earth. Prophets fall silent, and priests overtake the kingdom to make it **theirs**. Then, possessing the kingdom, they take a tenth of all the people earn and divert it to their captains, to their appointed authorities—and they require the young men and daughters to serve as servants in the kingdom of the supplanters.

Emma Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and William Marks all said that without Joseph Smith there was no longer a Kingdom of God on earth.

Dispensations are founded by prophets who establish practices and forms of worship to be administered by priests. In the moment a dispensation is founded, both the prophet **and** the priest are present. Moses was a prophet and established priestly rites. Christ was a prophet (and more), and He also established priestly rites. Similarly, Joseph Smith was an authentic dispensation head who was both a prophet and established priestly rites. **We** expect to have added to the prophetic voice heard among us an additional priestly set of rites in a temple founded by God. We await commands to identify the location and to begin construction. We've been told to expect that command will come.

The reason an apostasy can be concealed from the view of the religious believers is because the presence of continuing priestly tradition conceals the absence of the prophetic tradition. Concealing the fact that the prophetic is gone happens so easily because priests focus on **authority** and move the idea of authority into the **central, even controlling**, issue for salvation.

Catholics held a monopoly for a thousand years, using the idea of keys from Saint Peter as the foundation upon which the religion was built. It was not until the Eastern Orthodox faith departed, there was any choice to be made between keys. Only then could people choose between claims of keys in Rome and keys in ~~Constantinople~~ [Constantinople]. It took Martin Luther to finally peel away the fraud of keys held by wicked men, independent from righteousness. His expositions on the priesthood of faith allowed a divorce between claims of priestly keys and faith in God. It took Martin Luther's revolution in thinking to spread for several hundred years to create a religious landscape where Joseph Smith and a new dispensation of the gospel could be introduced.

These things move slowly because mankind is generally imprisoned by their traditions and are incapable of seeing the difference between the *priestly* and the *prophetic*. This **blindness** becomes the **tool** through which the priestly tradition controls mankind.

- *Priestly tradition* is stable; authoritarian; controlling; focused on outward conduct; amasses wealth, power, and prestige. Priestly tradition can continue in the absence of spirit, revelation, or even godliness. Priestly tradition can become the friend of government, business, and empires, and can work hand in hand with the powers of this world.
- *Prophetic tradition* is unruly, unpredictable, and challenges the god of this world. It cannot work with the powers of this world, but strikes at its authority. It cannot exist without the direct involvement of God and angels, and it cannot be divorced from continuing revelation.

You can have both traditions without an apostasy. You can have the prophetic without an apostasy. You can even have a priestly tradition without an apostasy, but that is **much less likely**. In any complete apostasy, the presence of the priestly tradition is essential to be able to accomplish the **trick** of an unacknowledged apostasy. The trick to successfully substituting apostasy for the Kingdom of God is to distract people into thinking there hasn't

been any change. The believers need to think everything remains intact. Apostate priests always claim there has been a perfect continuity and preservation of the keys.

So the idea of apostasy changes in the hands of the apostates. Instead of focusing on the silence of God in absence of the prophetic, apostasy is **redefined** to require individual conformity to the group. Only individuals become apostate, not the group. This allows claims of apostasy to be discussed under the watchful eye of the priests without anyone ever searching into the overall condition of a **fallen people**.

The Jews mocked efforts to tell them they were apostate. They thought it was humorous when Lehi preached the idea, because they were so very religious, so devout, so unassailably active in following God. The idea was absolutely laughable that **they** were apostate.

The Apostle Paul said the problem would begin at the top with the shepherds who would teach them falsehoods as truth. *For I know this: that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them...* (Acts 12:4 RE). These new leaders would have only a form of godliness without any real power to save.

Paul wrote:

This know also: that in the last days, perilous times shall come; for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous [covetous of their authority, covetous of their status, covetous of their rank, covetous of the priest-HOOD and of their priestly position], boasters, proud, blasphemers [it's blasphemy to attribute to God what God did not authorize. It's not merely bearing false witness, it's also blasphemy. You hear blasphemy from the religious leaders who, speaking and pretending to act in the name of God, have no authority or permission from Him to do as they claim], ...unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, without self-control, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof. (2 Timothy 1:8 RE)

The Christian world adopted another false replacement of the original church. It became so universal it was hailed as the Universal (or Catholic) Church. It “rule[d] from the rivers to the ends of the earth” as the only official form of the faith established by Christ. To accomplish this, Satan was concerned with the macro-institutional failure, not just individuals falling away. That's always his objective! If the religion becomes corrupt, then devotion **for even the best of people** is meaningless. They cannot achieve salvation because the Kingdom of God has departed.

Satan is involved in strategic defeat of mankind. The small tactical battles between people is the concern of lesser fallen spirits. It's the small, minor spirits who follow Lucifer who tempt individuals to commit sin. Success for the adversary is not accomplished in petty

enterprises. He wants “failure for the whole” so none can be saved. For that, **apostasy must be universal**. He has never succeeded by admitting there has been a failure—the trick is always to have the apostasy come unnoticed, unacknowledged, and from within.

Christ quoted the Father as He foretold what would happen:

At that day when the gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fullness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations, and if they shall do all these things, and shall reject the fullness of my gospel, Behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fullness of my gospel from among them. (3 Nephi 7:5 RE)

Apostasy must first be noticed, acknowledged, and exposed before it is possible to repent and return. Until then, it progresses a-pace, discarding and rejecting what might have been given, all the while being happily ignored by the believers whose devotion will not save. The enemy succeeds when he manages to get us **not** to reject ordinances, but to **change** them. As soon as they are changed, they are broken.

The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. (Isaiah 7:1 RE)

And the day comes that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people, for they have strayed from [mine] ordinances and have broken my everlasting covenant. They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walks in his own way and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol which waxes old and shall perish. (T&C 54:3)

Those two statements about changing the ordinances and breaking the covenant are: first, a quote from Isaiah who prophesied about it happening; and second, a revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith saying it **was** happening.

Changing the ordinances has always been an important step because then even people who believe there was a restoration through Joseph Smith can continue to claim they follow a true religion, while practicing one that has been broken. These practitioners become like the ancient Jews who mocked Lehi because they knew they were still righteous; they knew Lehi was foolish, even fraudulent. They still had the truth, the ordinances, the temple, and the priesthood. Lehi was thought to be merely a mistaken crank.

The Kingdom of God is with **us**, and for the present, we are still left among people who have not awakened to their awful situation. We should warn them and seek to recover as many

as will listen. If you're awakened, warn your neighbor. We have a work to do among others before the Lord will have us depart from people He still loves and hopes to save.

I've seen and read of prayers and fasting by those among us who want a temple. Why do you think the Lord hesitates in giving the command? When He answers and says for us to remain and labor among other people He hopes to save, do you think we can neglect that obligation and still hasten His command to build a temple? I leave it to you to answer those questions.

Now, I want to clarify a point, because Joseph Smith actually knew what he was doing and—had he been around long enough—would have accomplished a work that was still at its very incipient stage at the time that he was slain. In the Council of Fifty, which he called the Kingdom of God (which was nondenominational because members of other religious beliefs were invited into the Kingdom of God)—

The Kingdom of God was not the church. The church was simply a mechanism for promulgating the gospel, disseminating the Book of Mormon, and accomplishing a certain work. But the Kingdom of God was something different.

Inside that Kingdom of God, Joseph Smith had himself anointed a king; and Emma, a queen. Hold that thought for one moment, because there's a statement made in Second Nephi. These things need to be understood.

But behold, this land, saith God, shall be a land of thine inheritance, and the gentiles shall be blessed upon the land. And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land who shall [rise] up unto the gentiles, and I will fortify this land against all other nations. And he that fighteth against Zion shall perish, saith God, for he that raiseth up a king against me shall perish. For I the Lord, the King of Heaven, will be their king, and I will be a light unto them for ever that hear my words. (2 Nephi 7:2 RE)

Joseph Smith knew exactly what he was doing. He intended to be a king, **subordinate to** the King of Heaven. He intended to create other kings, subordinate to **him**, all of them subordinate to **God**. Because the God of this land and the King that will rule over this land is Christ. *He that raiseth up a king **against me** shall perish* (ibid). Joseph Smith was not seeking to establish a kingdom **against** God. He was seeking to establish a kingdom **subordinate to** and **obedient to** the overall King of Heaven—as a subordinate to Him. Joseph Smith intended to establish the Kingdom of God and to be a king because that is what the Kingdom of God consists of.

Look, I read it just a moment ago. *It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of **kings** to search out a matter* (Proverbs 4:1 RE). Joseph Smith was **always** searching out and revealing new things to the people. It was his **honor** as the **king** to do that. *The glory of God to conceal a thing but the honor of kings to search out a matter*— and who is the **king** that

allowed the earthly man to search the matter out? It is the King of Heaven; it is Christ. The one who conceals is also the one that can reveal. Joseph Smith was fitting the pattern.

And then, this last thought—and we'll end, and you can socialize or fight among yourselves or... or she and I can go argue in the hallway about something.

Joseph Smith wrote a letter that was never canonized—an excerpt from it, altered in *its* form even, got published in the LDS canon of scriptures—but the entire letter that he wrote is now in the Teachings and Commandments, section 146. And there's a statement that gets made that I want to make sure, as part of this talk, I clarify or give a key (yeah, there's one), so you can comprehend **this** thing.

The standard of truth has been erected. The “standard of truth” is the Book of Mormon. It's been erected because it's been put into print. It's been in print, albeit in an altered form—until we fixed that with the latest set of scriptures; it goes back to manuscripts and tries to fix as much of that as possible. Nevertheless:

The standard of truth [that is, the Book of Mormon] has been erected. No unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing: persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall [have been] accomplished and the great Jehovah shall say, The work is done. (T&C 146:20)

This prophecy is not about an institution. This prophecy is about the “standard of truth” going forward. And while the “standard of truth” has gone forward primarily in the hands of missionaries belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to whom credit should be given for all of that good work, it is going to go forth **independent**, meaning no one is going to own and control and have the institutional right to profit from the “standard of truth” going forward. It will sweep the earth, and right now, one of the biggest challenges of getting the Book of Mormon to be taken seriously by people is the apparent coupling of the Book of Mormon **to** the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. There are people out there who have great offense, umbrage, and opposition to the LDS Church who, for that reason alone, will not consider reading the Book of Mormon. But it is another testament, and it was always intended that it go forth **independent** of everything else.

I've spent a great deal of time and effort, including just within the last few months, traveling around the country, attending conferences in Tennessee with evangelicals, speaking to a group in Montgomery, Alabama that included Catholics and Baptists and others, attempting to get them to take seriously the Book of Mormon as an authentic Christian message, separate and apart from any institution. I would hope Presbyterians and Lutherans—I would hope that people that belong to the Church of England—would all be willing to look at the Book of Mormon and see what it adds to their Christian faith. I've said before and I'll repeat it again: we can baptize anyone who is willing to accept the doctrine of Christ. You don't have to swear allegiance to the Southern Baptist Convention in order to

be saved. You don't have to pledge allegiance to the Pope or kneel to the president of any of the various Restoration groups.

Accept the doctrine of Christ. There are those who, free of charge, will baptize you. They expect nothing from you. They intend to sacrifice their time, their means, and their effort in order to perform the ordinance. No one is profiting. None of you who are practicing the faith in the form that it is presently being practiced should profit from that. We gather tithes, and we use that tithe to help those among us who need assistance—and there are presently some people among us who **need** assistance. And the glory of God is manifest in their life by the outpouring of your generosity. You're going to help them. You're giving of funds to help them defray their indebtedness, answering their medical needs. **Those** are the kinds of things that knit hearts together. **That's** what the religion was intended to accomplish. It was not intended to buy the minister a house or to pay to fly a church official with his bodyguards in first-class to Europe to attend area conferences. It was not intended to build ornate marble floors and statuary, in order to prop up the claim of priests who know not God.

Well, I've enjoyed everything that I've seen and heard in this conference. There was a mom who had a little baby a couple rows in front of us during the opening prayer, and the baby, during the prayer, lost all patience with the length of our opening prayer and began to offer a petition of her own. And I really enjoyed that! And to my dismay, mom got up and took the child out. I was trying to figure out what the child was praying for 'cuz I was thinking, "I might want some of that too, if I could...." Babies don't have words yet; they have noises. And a lot of time the noise sounds like a cry when, in fact, they could be communicating phenomenal things to us, their tongues not being loosed for our sake because if we heard what they had to say—

Perhaps they're announcing the judgment of angels upon our poor assembly. Perhaps they're celebrating in what way they can. I love it when the kids are around, and that noise, to me, is a delight, not an irritant.

Let me end by bearing testimony to you that all of the good things that you do, all of the faith that you have, all of the labors that you do for Christ's sake, in seeking after Him with a pure and unworldly/unprofitable in this world motivation— all of that cleanses your soul and brings you closer to heaven. You want to know how to get angels to pay attention to you? Sacrifice for the benefit of others.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

MAN: Denver, can you take some questions?

DENVER: I'll take one question. It's gotta be a good one. Does anyone got a good question? Yeah, oh okay...

MAN: So, you mentioned one thing. So one thing that's been on my mind is, as a group, what lack we yet? You've got to admit, you've been kind of pessimistic about our prospects for Zion. And you mentioned one thing during this talk and that was about opening our mouth to those who the Lord loves. Anything else you want to say?

DENVER: Yeah, I want to—

MAN: Can you justify your pessimism?

DENVER: Yeah, okay. So the question was premised on my pessimism that I've expressed before, and I want to challenge the premise because I thought something happened over at the conference in Grand Junction, last conference we had, that was—

There was a real different look and feel to what went on over there. And to me, it was like we had turned a corner.

We have been a really rancorous group of people who are strongly opinionated. It's like we're refugees from an abusive experience in a hierarchical religion that, as soon as we are set at liberty, everyone wants to pick at the slightest hint that you're aspiring to be the next Relief Society president or the next bishop or—just all of that. There's a decompression, there's a “post-religious trauma syndrome” that was really evident. Everyone was walking around saying, more or less, “I've been abused. Religion has been a source of anxiety and trouble in my life, and you're practicing religion—but by damn, you're not going to practice your religion on me! I mean, I want to have the liberty with which Christ has made me free. I do not want to have that experience repeat itself. I want nothing of that.” And that—we were wearing that, and probably every one of us were wearing that chip on all of our shoulders.

I didn't see that over at Grand Junction. I didn't see people worried about the motivations of one another. I didn't see them looking for cause to complain or cause to take offense at what someone else was saying. I thought we turned a corner, and something happened. And maybe we needed a little while to decompress. Maybe we needed a little while to—

And as other people come in, they're probably going to walk in with exactly the same attitude that many of us had for the first several years because of our prior experience. We're just going to have to bear with that. And they need to get over that, because there's a lot of personal intrusiveness and personal abuse that goes on in the name of the Restoration. It's worse among the fundamentalist group. It's worse among the people that have come out from that tradition to say, “Let us—let us join in here.” All of them have suffered from religious abuse.

But I am not as pessimistic as I was. I really—

I was authentically down, and now I'm saying, “Ah, this may happen.” In fact, at this point—

MAN: But don't you think that's a minority? As I look around at the fellowships, and I don't see that clamor, and that— and I have maybe just a little...

DENVER: No, but it dominated the dialogue; the conflict dominated the dialogue. And that's one of the tools that get used. You can have 10 good people, and if you have two of them (or two others, so there's a total of 12), if two of the 12 are willing to be rancorous and complaining and upsetting, that spirit will invade the other 10. The problem is not just aggregating good people, the problem is also knowing how to not take offense from the people that are still running around pecking on one another. We're gonna have those people, and more of that attitude will come as people say, "I can no longer uphold this tradition. I respect Joseph; I respect the Restoration; I accept the Book of Mormon; I believe that God intends to bring back Zion—I believe all those things." But they come among us with this trauma, and they need a while to decompress. We're still gonna have that. What we need to do is to become adult enough to do the kinds of things that Jennifer Willis and my wife were talking about earlier today, about not taking those offenses—and letting them vent. Maybe what they're talking about is absolutely therapeutic and healthy for them, and they need to vent. Just don't join in; just don't encourage it. Let 'em know you understand. Put an arm around them and say, "I've been there," and then move on. "Hey, let's go help weed a garden."

There was an occasion when a son and I (he was a teenager, at the time) were really at odds—I mean, a pretty sharp conflict— and he and I about came to blows with one another. And I didn't like the way that left, and I didn't like the way that unfolded. So the next day, I got him up early (it was on a weekend), and he and I went out and worked in the yard. There was a project that needed to be doing, and we did the project together. It involved shovels and a lot of hard work. And both of us, for about, I don't know, a couple of hours, we dug like angry men. After two hours of digging and taking it out on the project that needed to be done, we didn't have the energy left to fight anymore. It, we— "You thirsty? You wanna run down to McDonald's and get something?" And it was over; the conflict was over because the backyard took the anger, and we got over it.

People act rationally; people don't vent without a cause. For the most part, when it comes to religious anxieties, what motivates them can be very deep, can be very troubled, can be very sincere. And if you extend empathy and sympathy and hear 'em out, you may find that underlying all of that is not aggression, underlying all of that is a broken heart and disappointment with what their fellow man has done.

I mean, one of the things that Christ—in the Sermon on the Mount—tells people to do is to bless those that curse you. Every one of us have seen the religious phony, the hypocrite, the pretentious religious character who comes along, portraying themselves as something that they're really not. The reason Christ in the Sermon on the Mount says to bless the people that are spitefully using you or abusing you and to do good that treat you evil for His namesake is because they're doing that to you, initially, because they think you're one of those hypocrites. They think you're one of those false religionists. They believe you, too, are nothing more than the last guy who abused someone on the mission, who took advantage

of their position of authority, who exploited (maybe in a way that was felonious, and they ought to be in jail) victims—and they're angry about that, and they're taking it out on you. But if you really are a disciple of Christ, you will turn the other cheek; you will return kindness for goodness; you will ask them, even as they crucify you, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Many times they literally do not know what they're doing. They've got in their mind a monster, and they react to that monster. And it takes a while before they begin to recognize the image of Christ in the countenance of the kindly and the forgiving. You have to be the kindly and the forgiving. And there are a lot—

In fact, the whole—the whole theme of this conference is devoted to that very issue.

How do we get along better with one another? Start assuming that underlying much of the anger and hostility and friction is a broken heart and a legitimate reason for their anger and their fear and their troubled heart. And soothe that troubled heart.

That is a good question.

Thank you.