

THE IMPORTANCE OF JOSEPH SMITH IN MORMONISM

By Sandra Tanner

On April 6, 1830, Joseph Smith, a 24 year old farmer in western New York, gathered a few friends together to form the “only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth.”¹ At that meeting, Smith proclaimed that God had designated him as His mouthpiece:

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.²

In 2005 the LDS Church orchestrated a number of events to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Joseph Smith’s birth. Speaking at the semi-annual LDS Conference in Salt Lake City, President Thomas S. Monson, counselor to President Gordon B. Hinckley at that time, expounded on Joseph Smith’s important role in the last days:

My brothers and sisters, in this bicentennial year of his birth, I should like to speak of our beloved Prophet **Joseph Smith**. . . . In the 135th section of the *Doctrine and Covenants* we read the words of John Taylor concerning the Prophet Joseph: “**Joseph Smith**, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, **has done more, save Jesus only**, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it.” [D&C 135: 3]

. . . I know **he was God’s prophet, chosen to restore the gospel of Jesus Christ in these latter days**. . . . May our lives reflect the knowledge we have that God lives, that Jesus Christ is His Son, that Joseph Smith was a prophet, and that we are led today by another prophet of God—even President Gordon B. Hinckley.

. . . In my first meeting with the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve in the temple, the hymn which we sang, **honoring Joseph Smith**, the Prophet, was and is a favorite of mine. I close with a verse from that hymn:

*Praise to the man [Joseph Smith] who
communed with Jehovah!
Jesus anointed that Prophet and Seer.
Blessed to open the last dispensation,
Kings shall extol him, and nations revere.*³

I testify of this solemn truth, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.⁴

In the December 2003 *Ensign* article entitled “Joseph Smith: Restorer of Truth,” there are various quotes from past LDS prophets and apostles attesting to Smith’s importance in restoring the true gospel. Joseph F. Smith, sixth president of the LDS Church, is quoted as saying:

The day will come—and it is not far distant, either—when **the name of the Prophet Joseph Smith** will be coupled with the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Son of God, as his representative, as his agent whom he chose, **ordained and set apart to lay anew the foundations of the Church of God in the world**, which is indeed the Church of Jesus Christ, possessing all the powers of the gospel, all the rites and privileges, the authority of the Holy Priesthood, and every principle necessary to fit and qualify both the living and the dead **to inherit eternal life, and to attain to exaltation in the kingdom of God**.⁵

Further in the same 2003 article is a quote from Harold B. Lee, eleventh president of the LDS Church:

“**No man can accept Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world**, no man can accept this as His church, the Church of Jesus Christ, **unless he can accept Joseph Smith as God’s mouthpiece and the restorer of His work in these latter days**.”⁶

Also in the 2003 article is a quote from Gordon B. Hinckley, the fifteenth president of the LDS Church:

“How great indeed is our debt to him [Joseph Smith]. . . . **It was he who brought us a true knowledge of God, the Eternal Father, and His Risen Son, the Lord Jesus Christ**. During the short time of his great vision he learned more concerning the nature of Deity than all of those who through centuries had argued the matter in learned councils and scholarly forums. . . . To him, from those who held it anciently, came the priesthood, the power, the gift, the authority, the keys to speak and act in the name of God. He gave us the organization of the Church and its great and sacred mission. Through him were restored the keys of the holy temples, that men and women might enter into eternal covenants with God and that the great work for the dead might be accomplished to open the way for eternal blessings. . . .

“**We stand in reverence before him** [Joseph Smith]. He is the great prophet of this dispensation. He stands at the head of this great and mighty work which is spreading across the earth. **He is our prophet, our**

1 *Doctrine and Covenants* 1:30.

2 *Ibid.*, 21:5.

3 The full text of the hymn can be read at <http://mldb.byu.edu/phelps4.htm>

4 “The Prophet Joseph Smith: Teacher by Example,” *Ensign*, (Nov. 2005).

<http://www.lds.org/ensign/2005/11/the-prophet-joseph-smith-teacher-by-example>

5 Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], p. 134; as quoted in “Joseph Smith: Restorer of Truth,” *Ensign*, (Dec. 2003): p. 17.

6 Clyde J. Williams, ed., *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, [1996], p. 371 as quoted in *Ensign* (Dec. 2003).

revelator, our seer, our friend. Let us not forget him. Let not his memory be forgotten in the celebration of Christmas. God be thanked for the Prophet Joseph”⁷

In the Bible, however, we are called to faith in Christ, not faith in a man or a church. In the New Testament John wrote:

He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have **eternal life**, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:12-13 NKJV)

However, Mormonism has added the acceptance of Joseph Smith and his revelations to the requirements for eternal life (also known as exaltation, which they view as being greater than salvation).

Statements by Joseph Smith

In a letter to James Arlington Bennett on November 13, 1843, Joseph Smith wrote:

Shall I, **who have heard the voice of God**, and communed with angels, and spake as moved by the Holy Ghost for the renewal of the everlasting covenant, and for the gathering of Israel in the last days,—shall I worm myself into a political hypocrite? **Shall I, who hold the keys of the last kingdom, in which is the dispensation of the fullness of all things spoken by the mouths of all the holy Prophets since the world began**, under the sealing power of the Melchizedek Priesthood,—shall I stoop from the sublime authority of Almighty God, to be handled as a monkey’s cat-paw, and pettify myself into a clown to act the farce of political demagoguery? No—verily no! . . .

I combat the errors of ages; I meet the violence of mobs; I cope with illegal proceedings from executive authority; I cut the gordian knot of powers, and I solve mathematical problems of universities, with truth—diamond truth; and God is my “right hand man.”⁸

At the LDS Conference on April 8, 1844, Joseph Smith proclaimed:

God made Aaron to be the mouth piece for the children of Israel, and **He will make me be god to you in His stead, and the Elders to be mouth for me; and if you don’t like it, you must lump it.**⁹

On Sunday, May 26, 1844, Joseph Smith preached:

God is in the still small voice. In all these affidavits, indictments, it is all of the devil—all corruption. Come on! ye prosecutors! ye false swearers! All hell, boil over!

Ye burning mountains, roll down your lava! for I will come out on the top at last. **I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam.** A large majority of the whole have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. **I boast that no man ever did such a work as I. The followers of Jesus ran away from Him; but the Latter-day Saints never ran away from me yet.**¹⁰

LDS Leaders Preach on the Importance of Joseph Smith

In 1998 President Gordon B. Hinckley declared:

“Our entire case as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints rests on the validity of [Joseph Smith’s] glorious First Vision. . . . Nothing on which we base our doctrine, nothing we teach, nothing we live by is of greater importance than this initial declaration. **I submit that if Joseph Smith talked with God the Father and His Beloved Son, then all else of which he spoke is true. This is the hinge on which turns the gate that leads to the path of salvation and eternal life.**”¹¹

Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, who later became the tenth president of the LDS Church, wrote:

Mormonism, as it is called, **must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith.** He was either a prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned, or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. There is no middle ground.¹²

Apostle Bruce R. McConkie observed:

No one can believe in Christ as the Son of God without also believing that Peter, James, and John were the apostles who bore record of him. **Similarly, those who accept Christ in the full sense today must believe that Joseph Smith is his revealer and prophet for the final dispensation.**¹³

Brigham Young, second president of the LDS Church, on August 13, 1871, declared:

Well, now, examine the character of the Savior, and examine the characters of those who have written the Old and New Testaments; and then **compare them with the character of Joseph Smith**, the founder of this work—the man whom God called and to whom he gave the keys of Priesthood, and through whom he has established his Church and kingdom for the last time, and **you will find that his character stands as fair as that of any man’s mentioned in the Bible. We can find no person who**

7 *Ensign*, (December 2003).

8 *History of the Church*, (Deseret Book, 1975), vol. 6, p. 78.

9 *History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 319-320.

10 *History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 408-9.

11 *Ensign*, (Nov. 1998), pp. 70-71.

12 Bruce R. McConkie, compiler, *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, (Bookcraft, 1954), vol. 1, p. 188.

13 Bruce McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, (Bookcraft, 1998), vol. 1, p. 337.

presents a better character to the world when the facts are known than Joseph Smith, jun., the prophet, and his brother, Hyrum Smith, who was murdered with him.¹⁴

On July 13, 1862, Brigham Young preached:

I have taught for thirty years, and still teach, that he that believeth in his heart and confesseth with his mouth that Jesus is the Christ and that **Joseph Smith is his Prophet** to this generation, is of God; and he that confesseth not that Jesus has come in the flesh **and sent Joseph Smith with the fulness of the Gospel** to this generation, is not of God, but is **antichrist**. All who confess that **Joseph Smith** is sent of God in the latter days, to lay the foundation of his everlasting kingdom no more to be thrown down, and will continue to keep his commandments, are born of God. All those who believe in their hearts and confess with their mouths that **Joseph Smith** is a true Prophet, at the same time trying with their might to live the holy principles **Joseph the Prophet** has revealed, are in possession of the Holy Spirit of God and are entitled to a fullness.¹⁵

Apostle George F. Richards, speaking about Joseph Smith's first vision at LDS Conference in 1948, stated:

In my remarks today, I desire to speak of some of the evidences of the divine, personal, and glorified existence of God, the Eternal Father, and of his Son, Jesus Christ, a knowledge of whom I regard as the world's greatest need; also to give evidence of the fact that **Joseph Smith was a divinely inspired prophet of God**, that he was an instrument in the hands of God in the **restoration of the everlasting gospel, and the establishment of the Church and kingdom of God on earth in this, the gospel Dispensation of the Fulness of Times**. . . .

It is of supreme importance that the story told by this boy **Joseph Smith**, and the evidence of its truth, be carefully and prayerfully considered, **for upon the truth or falsity of his story, Mormonism, so-called, must stand or fall.**¹⁶

In 1891 Joseph F. Smith, sixth president of the LDS Church, wrote:

I have always rejoiced in the assurances I have had, from my youth up, of the righteousness and purity of our cause, inspiring my soul with a fervent conviction of the verity and authenticity of the divine mission of our great Redeemer, the Son of God; **and also that of His servant Joseph Smith**. And I hold that **to accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world I must necessarily accept Joseph Smith, as a divinely inspired servant and prophet of God**. Their works tally exactly; the spirit pervading their mission upon earth is one and the same; the power by which they acted emanated from

the same source; their precepts and teachings had the same end in view; and the power of their Priesthood, and the validity of their doctrine have the same force and effect. And for similar causes were they condemned unto death by wicked men.¹⁷

Joseph Smith's Consent Needed to Enter the Celestial Kingdom

President Brigham Young declared that everyone needs Joseph Smith's approval in order to enter the highest level of heaven:

Joseph Smith holds the keys of this last dispensation, and is now engaged behind the veil in the great work of the last days. I can tell our beloved brother Christians who have slain the Prophets and butchered and otherwise caused the death of thousands of Latter-day Saints, the priests who have thanked God in their prayers and thanksgiving from the pulpit that we have been plundered, driven, and slain, and the deacons under the pulpit, and their brethren and sisters in their closets, who have thanked God, thinking that the Latter-day Saints were wasted away, something that no doubt will mortify them—something that, to say the least, is a matter of deep regret to them—namely, **that no man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith**. From the day that the Priesthood was taken from the earth to the winding-up scene of all things, **every man and woman must have the certificate of Joseph Smith, junior, as a passport to their entrance into the mansion where God and Christ are—I with you and you with me. I cannot go there without his consent.**¹⁸

LDS Apostle George Q. Cannon concurred:

He [Joseph Smith] was faithful, and died faithful.

. . . **If we get our salvation we shall have to pass by him; if we enter into our glory it will be through the authority that he has received.** We cannot get around him; we cannot get around President Young; we cannot act around President Taylor; we cannot get around the Twelve Apostles. If we ever attain to that eternal glory that God has promised to the faithful we shall have to pass by them. If we enter into our exaltation, **it will be because they, as the servants of God, permit us to pass by**, just as the revelation says, "pass by the angels and the Gods, which are set there," to our exaltation.¹⁹

Apostle Parley P. Pratt, preaching in 1856, declared:

. . . I bear this testimony this day, that **Joseph Smith** was and is a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator—an Apostle holding the keys of this last dispensation and of the kingdom of God, under Peter, James, and John. And not

14 *Journal of Discourses*, LDS Church, vol. 14, p. 203.

15 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 9 (July 13, 1862), p. 312.

16 *Conference Report*, LDS Church, (October 1948): p. 10. .

17 *Contributor*, vol. 12, no. 9 (July, 1891): p. 352.

18 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 7 (October 9, 1859), p. 289.

19 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 23 (October 29, 1882), p. 361.

only that he was a Prophet and Apostle of Jesus Christ, and lived and died one, but that he now lives in the spirit world, and **holds those same keys to usward and to this whole generation. Also that he will hold those keys to all eternity;** and no power in heaven or on the earth will ever take them from him; for he will continue holding those keys through all eternity, and will stand—yes, again in the flesh upon this earth, as the head of the Latter-day Saints under Jesus Christ, and under Peter, James, and John. **He will hold the keys to judge the generation to whom he was sent, and will judge my brethren that preside over me; and will judge me, together with the Apostles ordained by the word of the Lord through him and under his administration.**²⁰

Preaching in 1857 Brigham Young said:

Comparing spiritual with temporal things, it must be that God knows something about temporal things, and has had a body and been on an earth, were it not so He would not know how to judge men righteously, according to the temptations and sin they have had to contend with. If I can **pass brother Joseph**, I shall stand a good chance for passing Peter, Jesus, the Prophets, Moses, Abraham, and all back to Father Adam, and be pretty sure of receiving his approbation. . . . **If we can pass the sentinel Joseph the Prophet, we shall go into the celestial kingdom, and not a man can injure us.** If he says, “God bless you, come along here;” if we will live so that **Joseph will justify us**, and say, “Here am I, brethren,” we shall pass every sentinel; there will be no danger but that we will pass into the celestial kingdom.²¹

The Christian Perspective

The Christian looks to Christ alone for the gift of eternal life. Jesus declared:

I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

Yet, Spencer W. Kimball, twelfth president of the LDS Church, equated the gospel with the system of Mormonism:

[LDS] Ordinances are basic to the gospel. Now, **what is the gospel** of which we speak? It is the power of God unto salvation; **it is the code of [LDS] laws and commandments which help us to become perfect, and the ordinances which constitute the entrance requirements.**²²

To also require the acceptance of Joseph Smith, his church and its ordinances is adding to the gospel and atonement of Christ. Paul wrote:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Paul instructed the early Christians that we are declared righteous through our faith in Christ:

*Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. **This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.** There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and **all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.** (Romans 3:22-25)*

*For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ:** for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that **believeth;** to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For in it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, **The just shall live by faith.** (Romans 1:16-17)*

*To the praise of the glory of **his grace,** wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his [Christ's] blood, the forgiveness of sins, **according to the riches of his grace.** (Ephesians 1:6-7)*

The author of Hebrews exclaimed:

*So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that **look for him** shall he appear the second time without sin **unto salvation.** (Hebrews 9:28)*

Over and over the writers of the New Testament declare that eternal life is given to those who by faith accept Christ's atonement. It is not tied to the acceptance of a mortal man or church ordinances. John wrote:

***He that hath the Son hath life;** and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that **believe on the name of the Son of God;** that ye may know that ye have **eternal life,** and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:12-13)*

For a description of the true church, see this web site:
www.utlm.org/onlineresources/truechurch_jcryle.htm

For more information on the differences between standard Christian beliefs and Mormonism, see this page:
www.utlm.org/navonlineresources.htm

Also see these pages for more information:
www.mrm.org/topics/joseph-smith/no-salvation-without-joseph-smith and www.mrm.org/praise-to-the-man

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²⁰ *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 5 (September 7, 1856), pp. 195-196.

²¹ *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 4 (March 8, 1857), pp. 271-272.

²² *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, edited by Edward L. Kimball, (Bookcraft, 1982), p. 502.