

Saviors on Mount Zion

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25 Feb 2005

When the Lord spoke to the Prophet Joseph Smith in April of 1829 and instructed that “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (D&C 6:28), he was once again instructing man in the Lord’s law of witnessing. This law was one of the cornerstones of a talk recently given by Brother Steven L. Olsen, Associate Managing Director of the Church History Department, when he sagely reminded us that “remembering is antecedent to witnessing.” In the pages that follow, we will remember in a macroscopic way, that when we conclude we may be even better qualified to witness.

When the young boy Joseph entered a quiet grove on a spring morning in 1820 where he sought to pour out his soul in prayer, it is doubtful that he expected what the next short period in his life would bring. As the heavens opened, the most majestic vision of all time unfolded. That event was the beginning in this dispensation of the great work in which each of us is engaged. It has changed the lives of millions of people who have already lived and will change the lives of many more millions yet unborn.

That we may witness to the verity of the great work which has transpired since that momentous occasion in 1820, it is well that we first remember. Our remembering on this occasion will, as I have already mentioned, be more macroscopic than microscopic, for the purpose that we may see the broad vision of that which has brought us to where we are today. To me, it is interesting that when we view the introduction of the sacred ordinances and doctrines essential to inheriting eternal life; we find that the time may be conveniently divided into periods

of approximately a decade each. In the first ten years, from 1820 to 1830, the foundation of all that would follow was laid. Following the first vision of the Father and the Son, the angel Moroni came with his impressive counsel. Joseph would receive the golden plates and through painstaking spiritual effort, they would be translated. Portions of the sacred Bible would be translated under divine revelation; baptism and the Aaronic Priesthood would be reintroduced to the earth; the Melchizedek Priesthood was restored; and, ultimately, as that decade closed, the Church would be formally organized. The substructure necessary to produce the Lord's kingdom was now upon the earth.

In the decade of the 1830's the emphasis, to me, gradually changed. Certainly, additional elements of the structure came about in this decade including instruction on the Apostleship, the sacrament, and a host of other matters that today are commonplace. But, I do not see these as the centerpiece of the second decade of the Lord's dealings with the Prophet Joseph. Rather, the second decade was a decade of the Lord's searching for a temple. It had barely started when the Lord, in 1831, essentially said to the young prophet: Build Me a temple. While these are not the exact words used, they are in harmony with the exact meaning He intended to convey. This instruction was directed at the place which the Saints called Zion—Independence, Jackson County, Missouri. By August of that year, Joseph had found the land, purchased it, and dedicated it in the presence of a small group of people. Persecution and disobedience worked together to disrupt the plan, and Joseph was never able to see the temple in Zion built.

At the end of the next year, December of 1832, the Lord once again said in essence: Build Me a temple. This time, He was referring to Kirtland, Ohio. By July of 1833, Joseph had not yet commenced construction of the temple, and the Lord saw the need to chastise him. It is said that

chastisement was severe enough that it caused Hyrum and others such concern that they almost immediately began to work on digging the footings and foundation of the temple. That event is described by at least one writer with the words: “They [Hyrum and Reynolds Cahoon] finished [it] with their own hands” (See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation*, 1948, 2: 168).

The work of building the Kirtland temple would continue until 1836. During that time, the Saints in Missouri were undergoing severe persecution: Houses were destroyed; men, women, and children murdered; businesses ransacked and livestock stolen. The message to all identified as members of the Church was, “Get out of Jackson County.” Almost hand-in-hand with the persecution went increased disobedience in a seemingly downward spiral which ultimately led to the Saints being driven from the county at the loss of hundreds of homes and farms and dozens of businesses. The cost in dollars was astronomical given the economy of that time. Clay County became the temporary home for many of those driven from Jackson County, but permanent settlement for the body of the Church in Missouri was to be an illusive goal. In Kirtland, even as the temple was being constructed, speculation ran unchecked; dishonesty crept in among the people. The bank failed; and betrayal, persecution, and apostasy were rampant. It is frequently said that the temple was built with a trowel in one hand and a gun in the other.

Meanwhile back in Missouri, the 1830’s continued with the Saints leaving Clay County and relocating, in large part, to Caldwell County where the city of Far West would become an almost overnight city. It was here that the Lord said for the third time, in essence: Build Me a temple. The year was 1838. The temple site was in Far West. Ever obedient, Joseph set about to find the land, and, ultimately, a cornerstone was set and the land dedicated. Continued persecution and

disobedience again reared their ugly heads and that temple, too, was not built. Thus, the second decade of the restored church saw the Lord command three temples built, only one of which, and that in Kirtland, was completed. Dedicated in 1836, the heavens again opened, and the Lord came to accept His house. Priesthood keys were restored, among which were the keys of sealing so essential to the central doctrines of the restored gospel. To my mind, the Kirtland Temple was essentially an instruction temple and a place where the restoration of necessary keys could occur. It is clear from the physical structure itself that it was not intended as a place where such typically temple ordinances as baptisms for the dead and the holy endowment were to occur. While some of the preliminary ordinances were conducted, the full endowment must wait until well into the next decade.

As the decade of the 1830's came to a close, two sites dedicated for temples stood, and still stand, without their promise being fulfilled. The Kirtland Temple built and dedicated would, during this same decade, see its sacred uses end. It would be abandoned by the people who built it as they fled the area, and enemies of the Church would become the temple's new occupants.

With the dawn of the 1840's, the center of the Church focused in Nauvoo, Illinois. Fifteen thousand members ill-clothed, ill-equipped and in poor health had struggled from their homes in Missouri to the promise of a safe haven in which they could worship as the Constitution of their beloved land promised. Exhaustion, starvation, abuse, poverty, persecution, and faith were the hallmarks of our history as one decade turned into another.

The new decade brought new hope, and faith brought the courage to try yet another time. They followed their prophet-leader with a faith not often seen in the annals of human history. It

is interesting to me to observe that in all probability these marvelous, wonderful pioneers knew little about the temple which was the beacon of their faith and the center of their hope. Remember, the only temple that they knew was not a place where baptisms for the dead occurred, nor was it a place where the holy endowment could be received, nor the sealing ordinances of the temple experienced. While I believe the record is clear that the Prophet Joseph understood all of these doctrines, probably as early as the first part of the decade of the 1830's, I find nothing to indicate that they were shared with the people until sometime after they had settled in Nauvoo. In fact, I find some indication that the Prophet was not at liberty to share some of these matters until that time. To me, that makes their faith even more amazing. Had they understood the endowment and the sealing ordinance, the intensity with which they followed might have been a little more understandable. But, in the absence of that knowledge, the force which drove them on is a tribute to the depth of their testimony.

For a regular member of the Church, the dawn of the 1840's brought with it the dawn of new knowledge concerning eternal ordinances. In August of 1840, in a funeral sermon being delivered by the Prophet Joseph for Seymour Brunson, the Prophet is said to have observed a widow in the congregation whose son had died, but had never been baptized. Whether that occasioned the Prophet's remarks or not, we do not know, but his funeral discourse introduced to the membership of the Church the principle of baptism for the dead. Simon Baker, who was in attendance on that occasion, wrote: "I was present at a discourse that the prophet Joseph delivered on baptism for the dead 15 Aug 1840. He read the greater part of the 15th chapter of Corinthians. . . . He went on to say that people could now act for their friends who had departed this life, and that the plan of salvation was calculated to save all who were willing to obey the

requirements of the law of God” (Quoted in Joseph Smith, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, 1994: 49).

Following a general conference of the Church held in October of that same year, the Prophet added to his instructions on this sacred subject with this counsel: “The Saints have the privilege of being baptized for those of their relatives who are dead, whom they believe would have embraced the Gospel, if they had been privileged with hearing it, and who have received the Gospel in the spirit, through the instrumentality of those who have been commissioned to preach to them while in prison” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 1976:180).

It is clear that during this part of the decade of the 1840’s, the Prophet’s mind was occupied a great deal of the time with the subject of baptism for the dead. Wilford Woodruff, commenting upon this era some fifty years later and recalling the times when they were doing baptisms for the dead, wrote as follows: “Joseph Smith himself . . . went into the Mississippi River one Sunday night after meeting, and baptized a hundred. I baptized another hundred. The next man, a few rods from me, baptized another hundred. We were strung up and down the Mississippi, baptizing for our dead. But there was no recorder, we attended to this ordinance without waiting to have a proper record made” (*The Deseret Weekly*, Vol. 42:554, April 25, 1891; as quoted in *Temples of the Most High*, by N.B. Lundwall, 1993:69).

To this divinely inspired counsel the Prophet would later add the instruction contained in 127th and 128th sections of the Doctrine and Covenants of which Wilford Woodruff would comment: “But the Lord told Joseph that he must have recorders present at these baptisms—men who could see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and record these things.” [Then, in a

matter of fact way, he added:] “Of course, we had to do the work over again. Nevertheless, that does not say the work was not of God” (The Deseret Weekly, Vol. 42:554).

During the period of this increasing light and knowledge concerning the ordinance of baptism for the dead, the Lord again instructed the young prophet to build a temple. The instruction came in January of 1841, and He included additional direction by which Joseph was impressed with the necessity of constructing a baptismal font in the temple where such baptisms could occur. As further light and knowledge continued to be heaped upon Joseph, he learned that the Lord would no longer accept baptisms for the dead which had been occurring in the Mississippi River and in other places. At last, the Prophet, and now the Church, had been made aware of one of the ordinances associated with the welding link, uniting one generation to another back to Father Adam, and about which he said, after quoting the fifth and sixth verses of Malachi: “I might have rendered a plainer translation to this, but it is sufficiently plain to suit my purpose as it stands. It is sufficient to know, in this case, that the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and children, upon some subject or other—and behold what is this subject? It is the baptism for the dead. For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect” (D&C 128:18).

As earth shaking as was the revelation relating to baptism for the dead, there was yet more for the prophet-leader to teach the Lord’s people. In May of 1842, the endowment ordinance was unveiled to a handful of Church leaders. That unveiling occurred in the upper room of the Red Brick building in which Joseph operated his store. The room chosen was the area used by him for his office. Joseph, with the assistance of a few others, had gone to the upper room the day prior in order to make the necessary physical arrangements for the teaching which he intended to

do on the following day. Brigham Young and about eight other men met by invitation in that room on May 4, where they were tutored in the sacred endowment by Joseph. Of that occasion, Brigham Young wrote: “Joseph divided up the room the best he could. . . . After we completed these ordinances Brother Joseph turned to me and said, ‘Brother Brigham, this is not arranged perfectly; however, we have done the best we could under the circumstances in which we are placed. I wish you to take this matter in hand; organize and systematize all of these ceremonies.’ . . . [Each time we performed the ordinances under Joseph’s supervision,] I got something more, so I was able to organize them. When we performed the ordinances in the Temple at Nauvoo I understood and knew how to situate [everything]. We had our ceremonies pretty correct” (L. John Nuttall Diary, originals in Archives and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, under date of 7 February 1877, as quoted in *BYU Studies*, vol. 19, Number 2:159, *The Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding*, Transcribed and Edited by Andrew F. Ehat). It is said, “After that temple was destroyed, the Brethren carried those ordinances in their minds for over thirty years” (Boyd K. Packer, *Things of the Soul*, 183). Not long before Brigham’s death in 1877, he assigned Wilford Woodruff of the Quorum of the Twelve to write the ordinances.

Doctrinally, the people had now been introduced to two companion principles and ordinances relating to salvation: baptism for the dead and the endowment of the holy temple. In May and July of 1842 what are now the 131st and 132nd sections of the Doctrine and Covenants were unveiled to the people. These revelations, both of which deal in part with sealing, concluded the revelations on saving ordinances which Joseph would announce before his martyrdom. Imagine the anticipation of the people, many of whom were working on the construction of the Nauvoo Temple when the doctrine now found in the 131st section of the Doctrine and Covenants was

received: “In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]” (D&C 131:1-2). The simplicity of that revelation was followed approximately two months later by what is now contained in the 132nd section of the Doctrine and Covenants, which I consider to be some of the deepest, most beautiful, most poignant statements of doctrine in the entire pages of holy writ and which rounds out the Lord’s instruction on this capstone ordinance.

Even though the people had now received the instruction, for almost all of them participating in the ordinances must await completion of the Nauvoo Temple. In the meantime, the Prophet continued to teach the people. Of a talk given by him in 1844 to a large audience he wrote: “The weather was somewhat unpleasant. My subject was the sealing of the hearts of the fathers to children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers” (HC 6:183). He went on to say, “Zion [will be] built up, and the Saints to come up as saviors on Mount Zion” (HC 6:184). Many of you will recognize the ringing phrase “saviors on Mount Zion,” as coming from the Old Testament prophet Obadiah where it is recorded: “And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s” (Obadiah 1:21). In further comments upon this doctrine Joseph referred to Malachi 4:6, which reads: “And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” In relation to that scripture, Joseph taught:

The word turn here should be translated *bind*, or seal. But what is the object of this important mission? or how is it to be fulfilled? The keys are to be delivered, the spirit of Elijah is to come, the Gospel to be established, the Saints of God gathered, Zion built up, and the Saints to come up as saviors on Mount Zion.

But how are they to become saviors on Mount Zion? By building their temples, erecting their baptismal fonts, and going forth and receiving all the ordinances, baptisms, confirmations, washings, anointings, ordinations and sealing powers upon their heads, in behalf of all their progenitors who are dead. . . .

. . . I would advise all the Saints to go with their might and gather together all their living relatives to this place, that they may be sealed and saved, that they may be prepared against the day that the destroying angel goes forth; and if the whole Church should go to with all their might to save their dead, seal their posterity, and gather their living friends, and spend none of their time in behalf of the world, they would hardly get through before night would come, when no man can work (HC 6:184).

We have now macroscopically observed the development of the highest saving ordinances of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it was taught publicly by the Prophet Joseph. We have seen the inter-relationship between Malachi and Obadiah which is the relationship between turning the hearts of the children to the fathers and becoming saviors on Mount Zion. The practical implication of these documents was explained by the Prophet in what many consider to be his greatest sermon, a discourse given at the funeral of King Follett, a friend of the Prophet. There he taught: “The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us is to seek after our dead. The Apostle [Paul] says, ‘They without us cannot be made perfect;’ (Hebrews 11:40) for it is necessary that the sealing power should be in our hands to seal our children and our dead for the fullness of the dispensation of times—a dispensation to meet the promises made by Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world for the salvation of man” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 1976:356).

Thus, we come face to face with the great work of family history—the work of tying one generation to another by the sacred ordinances found in the holy temple. It is through these ordinances that can be found both the how and the why we tie one generation to another. It is a responsibility of Celestial proportion. It is an opportunity to become a partner with God. As

President Howard W. Hunter once said: “There are many members of the Church who have only limited access to the temples. . . . They pursue family history research and have the temple ordinance work done by others. Conversely, there are some members who engage in temple work but fail to do family history research on their own family lines. Although they perform a divine service in assisting others, they lose a blessing by not seeking their own kindred dead. . . . I have learned that those who engage in family history research and then perform the temple ordinance work for those whose names they have found will know the additional joy of receiving both halves of the blessing” (“A Temple-Motivated People,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1995). Of course, it is my hope and prayer that we will each receive both halves of the blessing.

We started with the understanding that “remembering is antecedent to witnessing.” We have just participated in remembering the unfolding of the doctrine which is central to the work of family history and the ordinances upon which it is based. As you contemplate your remembering the spirit will impress its importance upon your mind, the principles will distill upon your soul, and you will, in that time and in that moment, have the power to witness to others of the greatness of the work in which you are engaged. As you do, the work will indeed roll forth out of obscurity. You will become saviors on Mount Zion. You will be a partner with God in turning the hearts of the children to the fathers, and the welding link of which the Prophet so eloquently spoke and taught will indeed be forged.