

"Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence"

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There is a lesson in the Prophet Joseph Smith's account of the First Vision that virtually everyone in this audience has had occasion to experience, or one day soon will. It is the plain and very sobering truth that before great moments, certainly before great spiritual moments, there can come adversity, opposition, and darkness. Life has some of those moments for us, and occasionally they come just as we are approaching an important decision or a significant step in our life.

In the marvelous account that we read too seldom, Joseph said he had scarcely begun his prayer when he felt a power of astonishing influence come over him. Thick darkness, as he described it, gathered around him and seemed bent on his utter destruction. But he exerted all his powers to call upon God to deliver him out of the power of this enemy, and as he did so a pillar of light brighter than the noonday sun descended gradually until it rested upon him. At the very moment of the light's appearance, he found himself delivered from the destructive power that had held him bound. What then followed is the greatest epiphany since the events surrounding the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ in the meridian of time. The Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith, and the dispensation of the fulness of times had begun. (See JS--H 1:15—20.)

Most of us do not need any more reminders than we have already had that there is one who personifies "opposition in all things," that "an angel of God" fell "from heaven" and in so doing became "miserable forever." What a chilling destiny. Lehi teaches us that because this is Lucifer's fate, "he sought also the misery of all mankind" (2 Nephi 2:11, 17—18). Surely this must be the original ecclesiastical source for the homely little adage that misery loves company.

A morning's devotional could be devoted to this subject of the adversary's strong, *preliminary, anticipatory* opposition to many of the good things that God has in store for us. But today I want to move past that observation to another truth we may not recognize so readily. This is a lesson in the parlance of the athletic contest that reminds us "it isn't over until it's over." It is the reminder that the fight goes on. Unfortunately we must not think that Satan is defeated with that first, strong breakthrough that so dramatically brings the light and moves us forward.

To make my point a little more vividly, may I go to another passage of scripture, indeed to another vision. You will recall that the book of Moses begins with him being taken up to "an exceedingly high mountain" where, the scripture says, "he saw God face to face, and he talked with him, and the glory of God was upon Moses" (Moses 1:1—2). What then followed was what happens to prophets who are taken to high mountains. The Lord said to Moses,

Look, and I will show thee the workmanship of mine hands. . . .

And . . . Moses . . . beheld the earth, yea, even all of it; and there was not a particle of it which he did not behold, discerning it by the spirit of God.

And he beheld also the inhabitants thereof, and there was not a soul which he beheld not.
[Moses 1:4, 27—28]

This experience is remarkable by every standard. It is one of the great revelations given in human history. It stands with the greatest accounts we have of any prophet's experience with divinity.

But Moses' message to you today is, "Don't let your guard down." Don't assume that a great revelation, some marvelous illuminating moment, or the opening of an inspired path is the end of it. Remember, it isn't over until it's over. What happened to Moses next, *after* his revelatory moment, would be ludicrous if it were not so dangerous and so absolutely true to form. In an effort to continue his opposition, in his unflinching effort to get his licks in later if not sooner, Lucifer appeared and shouted in equal portions of anger and petulance *after* God had revealed himself to the prophet, saying, "Moses, worship *me*." But Moses was not having it. He had just seen the real thing, and by comparison this sort of performance was pretty dismal.

Moses looked upon Satan and said: Who art thou? . . . where is thy glory, that I should worship thee?

For behold, I could not look upon God, except his glory should come upon me. . . . But I can look upon thee in the natural man. . . .

. . . Where is thy glory, for it is darkness unto me? And I can judge between thee and God. . . .

Get thee hence, Satan; deceive me not. [Moses 1:13—16]

The record then depicts a reaction that is both pathetic and frightening.

And now, when Moses had said these words, Satan cried with a loud voice, and ranted upon the earth, and commanded, saying: I am the Only Begotten, worship me.

And it came to pass that Moses began to fear exceedingly; and as he began to fear, he saw the bitterness of hell. Nevertheless, calling upon God [the very phrase used by Joseph Smith], he received strength, and he commanded, saying: Depart from me, Satan, for this one God only will I worship, which is the God of glory.

And now Satan began to tremble, and the earth shook. . . .

And it came to pass that Satan cried with a loud voice, with weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth; and he departed hence. [Moses 1:19—22]

So Satan left, always to come again, we can be sure, but always to be defeated by the God of Glory--always.

I wish to encourage every one of you today regarding opposition that so often comes *after* enlightened decisions have been made, *after* moments of revelation and conviction have given us a peace and an assurance we thought we would never lose. In his letter to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul was trying to encourage new members who had just joined the Church, who undoubtedly had had spiritual experiences and had received the pure light of testimony, only to discover that not only had their troubles not ended, but that some of them had only begun.

It reminds me of President Hugh B. Brown's statement about marriage. He said he had always been told that when he got married he would come to the end of his troubles. So he got married, only to discover they were speaking about the front end. Now, you returned missionaries who are still sitting around single, don't chuckle too loudly at that. I am not through with you this morning!

Paul pled with those new members about the way President Hinckley is pleading with new members today. The reminder is that we cannot sign on for a moment of such eternal significance and everlasting consequence without knowing it will be a fight--a good fight and a winning fight, but a fight nevertheless. Paul said to those who thought a new testimony, a personal conversion, or a spiritual baptismal experience would put them beyond trouble, "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, *after ye were illuminated*, ye endured a great fight of afflictions" (Hebrews 10:32; emphasis added).

Then came this tremendous counsel, which is at the heart of my counsel to you and the title of my remarks this morning:

Cast not away therefore your confidence, *which hath great recompence of reward.*

For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.
...

... *If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. . . .*

... *We are not of them who draw back unto perdition.* [Hebrews 10:35—36, 38—39; emphasis added]

In LDS talk that is to say, "Sure it is tough--before you join the Church, while you are trying to join, and after you have joined." That is the way it has always been, Paul said, but don't "draw

back," he warned. Don't panic and retreat. Don't lose your confidence. Don't forget how you once felt. Don't distrust the experience you had. That tenacity is what saved Moses when the adversary confronted him, and it is what will save you.

I suppose every returned missionary and probably every convert within the sound of my voice knows exactly what I am talking about: appointments for discussions canceled, the Book of Mormon in a plastic bag hanging from a front-door knob, baptismal dates not met. And so it goes through the teaching period, through the commitments, through the baptism, through the first weeks and months in the Church, and more or less forever. At least the adversary would pursue it forever, if he thought he could see any weakening of your resolve or any chink in your armor--even if it is after the fact.

This opposition turns up almost anyplace something good has happened. It can happen when you are trying to get an education. It can hit you after your first month in your new mission field. It certainly happens in matters of love and marriage. (Now I am back to those returned missionaries.) I would like to have a dollar for every person in a courtship who knew he or she had felt the guidance of the Lord in that relationship, had prayed about the experience enough to know it was the will of the Lord, knew they loved each other and enjoyed each other's company, and saw a lifetime of wonderful compatibility ahead--only to panic, to get a brain cramp, to have total catatonic fear sweep over them. They "draw back," as Paul said, if not into perdition at least into marital paralysis.

I am not saying you shouldn't be very careful about something as significant and serious as marriage. And I certainly am not saying that a young man can get a revelation that he is to marry a certain person without that young woman getting the same confirmation. I have seen a lot of those one-way revelations in young people's lives. Yes, there are cautions and considerations to make, but once there has been genuine illumination, beware the temptation to retreat from a good thing. If it was right when you prayed about it and trusted it and lived for it, it is right now. Don't give up when the pressure mounts. You can find an apartment. You can win over your mother-in-law. You can sell your harmonica and therein fund one more meal. It's been done before. Don't give in. *Certainly don't give in to that being who is bent on the destruction of your happiness.* He wants everyone to be miserable like unto himself. Face your doubts. Master your fears. "Cast not away therefore your confidence." Stay the course and see the beauty of life unfold for you.

To help us make our way through these experiences, these important junctures in our lives, let me draw from another scriptural reference to Moses. It was given in the early days of this dispensation when revelation was needed, when a true course was being set and had to be continued.

Virtually everyone in the room knows the formula for revelation given in section 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants--you know, the verses about studying it out in your mind and the Lord promising to confirm or deny. What most of us don't read in conjunction with this is the section that precedes it--section 8. In that revelation the Lord defined *revelation*:

I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. [I love the combination there of both mind and heart. God will teach us in a reasonable way and in a revelatory way--mind and heart combined, by the Holy

Ghost.]

Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground. [D&C 8:2—3; emphasis added]

Question: Why would the Lord use the example of crossing the Red Sea as the classic example of "the spirit of revelation"? Why didn't he use the First Vision? Or the example from the book of Moses we just used? Or the vision of the brother of Jared? Well, he could have used any of these, but he didn't. Here he had another purpose in mind.

Usually we think of revelation as information. Just open the books to us, Lord, like: What was the political significance of the Louisiana Purchase or the essence of the second law of thermodynamics? It is obvious that when you see those kinds of questions on a test paper, you need revelation. Someone said prayer will never be eliminated from the schools so long as there are final examinations. But aside from the fact that you probably aren't going to get *that* kind of revelation--because in this Church we do not believe in ex nihilo creation, especially in exams--this is too narrow a concept of *revelation*. May I suggest how section 8 broadens our understanding of section 9, particularly in light of these "fights of affliction" that Paul spoke of and that I have been discussing.

First of all, revelation almost always comes in response to a question, usually an urgent question--not always, but usually. In that sense it does provide information, but it is urgently needed information, special information. Moses' challenge was how to get himself and the children of Israel out of this horrible predicament they were in. There were chariots behind them, sand dunes on every side, and just a lot of water immediately ahead. He needed information all right--what to do--but it wasn't a casual thing he was asking. In this case it was literally a matter of life and death.

You will need information, too, but in matters of great consequence it is not likely to come unless you want it urgently, faithfully, humbly. Moroni calls it seeking "with real intent" (Moroni 10:4). If you can seek that way, and stay in that mode, not much that the adversary can counter with will dissuade you from a righteous path. You can hang on, whatever the assault and affliction, because you have paid the price to--figuratively, at least--see the face of God and live.

Like Moses in his vision, there may come after the fact some competing doubts and some confusion, but they will pale when you measure them against the real thing. *Remember the real thing*. Remember how urgently you have needed help in earlier times and that you got it. The Red Sea will open to the honest seeker of revelation. The adversary does have power to hedge up the way, to marshal Pharaoh's forces and dog our escape right to the water's edge, but he can't produce the real thing. *He cannot conquer if we will it otherwise*. "Exerting all [our] powers to call upon God," the light will again come, the darkness will again retreat, the safety will again be sure. That is lesson number one about crossing the Red Sea, your Red Seas, by the spirit of revelation.

Lesson number two is closely related to it. It is that in the process of revelation and in making important decisions, fear almost always plays a destructive, sometimes paralyzing role. To Oliver Cowdery, who missed the opportunity of a lifetime because he didn't seize it in the lifetime of the opportunity, the Lord said, "You did not continue as you commenced." Does that

sound familiar to those who have been illuminated and then knuckled under to second thoughts and returning doubts? "It is not expedient that you should translate now," the Lord said in language that must have been very hard for Oliver to hear. "Behold, it was expedient when you commenced; *but you feared*, and the time is past, and it is not expedient now" (D&C 9:5, 10—11; emphasis added).

Every one of us runs the risk of fear. You do, and I do. Did you catch the line I tried to emphasize as I read the account from the Pearl of Great Price? For a moment in that confrontation, "Moses began to fear exceedingly; and as he began to fear, he saw the bitterness of hell" (Moses 1:20). That's when you see it--when you are afraid.

That is exactly the problem that beset the children of Israel at the edge of the Red Sea. That is lesson number two. It has everything to do with holding fast to earlier illumination. The record says, "And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid."

Some, just like those Paul had described earlier, said, "Let's go back. This isn't worth it. We must have been wrong. That probably wasn't the right spirit telling us to leave Egypt." What they actually said to Moses was, "Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? . . . It had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness" (Exodus 14:10—12).

And I have to say, "What about that which has already happened? What about the miracles that got you here? What about the frogs and the lice? What about the rod and the serpent, the river and the blood? What about the hail, the locusts, the fire, and the firstborn sons?"

How soon we forget. It would *not* have been better to stay and serve the Egyptians, and it is *not* better to remain outside the Church nor to reject a mission call nor to put off marriage and so on and so on forever. Of course our faith will be tested as we fight through these self-doubts and second thoughts. Some days we will be miraculously led out of Egypt--seemingly free, seemingly on our way--only to come to yet another confrontation, like all that water lying before us. *At those times we must resist the temptation to panic and to give up*. At those times fear will be the strongest of the adversary's weapons against us.

"And Moses said unto the people, *Fear ye not*, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. . . . The Lord shall fight for you."

In confirmation the great Jehovah said to Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Exodus 14:13—15; emphasis added).

That is the second lesson of the spirit of revelation. After you have gotten the message, after you have paid the price to feel his love and hear the word of the Lord, "go forward." Don't fear, don't vacillate, don't quibble, don't whine. You may, like Alma going to Ammonihah, have to find a route that leads an unusual way, but that is exactly what the Lord was doing here for the children of Israel. Nobody had ever crossed the Red Sea this way, but so what? There's always a first time. With the spirit of revelation, dismiss your fears and wade in with both feet. In the words of Joseph Smith, "Brethren [and, I would add, sisters], shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory!" (D&C 128:22).

The third lesson from the Lord's spirit of revelation in the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea is that, *along with the illuminating revelation that points us toward a righteous purpose or duty, God will also provide the means and power to achieve that purpose.* Trust in that eternal truth. If God has told you something is right, if something is indeed true for you, *he will provide the way for you to accomplish it.* That is true of joining the Church. It is true of getting an education, of going on a mission or of getting married or of any of a hundred worthy tasks in your young lives. Remember what the Savior said to the Prophet Joseph in the Sacred Grove. What was the problem in 1820? Why was Joseph not to join any other Church? It was at least in part because "they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, *but they deny the power thereof*" (JS--H 1:19; emphasis added).

God's grace is sufficient! The Lord would tell Joseph again and again through those early difficult days that, just as in the days of old, these modern children of Israel would

be led out of bondage by power, and with a stretched-out arm. . . .

Therefore, let not your hearts faint . . . : Mine angel shall go up before you. . . .

. . . and also my presence, and in time ye shall possess the goodly land. [D&C 103:17—20]

What goodly land? Your goodly land. Your promised land. Your New Jerusalem. Your own little acre flowing with milk and honey. Your future. Your dreams. Your destiny. I believe that in our own individual ways, God takes us to the grove or the mountain or the temple and there shows us the wonder of what his plan is for us. We may not see it as fully as Moses or Nephi or the brother of Jared did, but we see as much as we need to see in order to know the Lord's will for us and to know that he loves us beyond mortal comprehension. I also believe that the adversary and his pinched, calculating little minions try to oppose such experiences and then try to darken them after the fact. But that is not the way of the gospel. That is not the way of a Latter-day Saint who claims as the fundamental fact of the Restoration the spirit of revelation.

Fighting through darkness and despair and pleading for the light is what opened this dispensation. It is what keeps it going, and it is what will keep you going. With Paul, I say to all of you:

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. [Hebrews 10:35—36]

I acknowledge the reality of opposition and adversity, but I bear witness of the God of Glory, of the redeeming Son of God, of light and hope and a bright future. I promise you that God lives and loves you, each one of you, and that he has set bounds and limits to the opposing powers of darkness. I testify that Jesus is the Christ, the victor over death and hell and the fallen one who schemes there. The gospel of Jesus Christ is true, and it has been restored, just as we have sung and testified this morning.

"Fear ye not." And when the second and the third and the fourth blows come, "fear ye not. . . .

The Lord shall fight for you." "Cast not away therefore your confidence." I say this in the sacred and holy name of our Protector and Redeemer, even the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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