

The Test

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Neither mobbings nor the army could turn the Saints aside from what they knew to be true.



It is my purpose to show that in troubled times the Lord has always prepared a safe way ahead. We live in those “perilous times” which the Apostle Paul prophesied would come in the last days.¹ If we are to be safe individually, as families, and secure as a church, it will be through “obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”²

On July 24, 1849, the Saints had been in the valley two years to the day. They finally were free from years of mobbing and persecution. That called for a great celebration.

Just a few years earlier under dreadful conditions, the Prophet Joseph Smith suffered in Liberty Jail for months while the mobs drove the Saints from their homes. The words *liberty* and *jail* do not fit together very well.

Joseph called out:

“O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?”

“How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thine eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants, and thine ear be penetrated with their cries?”³

The Prophet Joseph Smith had earlier sought direction, and the Lord told the Saints to seek redress from the judges, the governor, and then the president.⁴

Their appeals to the judges failed. During his life, Joseph Smith was summoned to court over 200 times on all kinds of trumped-up charges. He was never convicted.

When they sought redress from Governor Boggs of Missouri, he issued a proclamation: “The Mormons must be treated as enemies and *must be exterminated* or driven from the state, if necessary for the public good.”⁵ That unleashed untold brutality and wickedness.

They appealed to President Martin Van Buren of the United States, who told them, “Your cause is just, but I can do nothing for you.”⁶

I will read the final paragraphs of their third petition addressed to the Congress of the United States:

“The afflictions of your memorialists have already been overwhelming, too much for humanity, too much for American citizens to endure without

complaint. We have groaned under the iron hand of tyranny and oppression these many years. We have been robbed of our property to the amount of two millions of dollars. We have been hunted as the wild beasts of the forest. We have seen our aged fathers who fought in the Revolution, and our innocent children, alike slaughtered by our persecutors. We have seen the fair daughters of American citizens insulted and abused in the most inhuman manner, and finally, we have seen fifteen thousand souls, men, women, and children, driven by force of arms, during the severities of winter, from their sacred homes and firesides, to a land of strangers, penniless and unprotected. Under all these afflicting circumstances, we imploringly stretch forth our hands towards the highest councils of our nation, and humbly appeal to the illustrious Senators and Representatives of a great and free people for redress and protection.

“Hear! O hear the petitioning voice of many thousands of American citizens who now groan in exile . . . ! Hear! O hear the weeping and bitter lamentations of widows and orphans, whose husbands and fathers have been cruelly martyred in the land where the proud eagle . . . floats! Let it not be recorded in the archives of the nations, that . . . exiles sought protection and redress at your hands, but sought it in vain. It is in your power to save us, our wives, and our children, from a repetition of the bloodthirsty scenes of Missouri, and thus greatly relieve the fears of a persecuted and injured people, and your petitioners will ever pray.”⁷

There was no pity, and they were turned away.

In 1844, while under the avowed protection of Governor Thomas Ford of Illinois, the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were shot to death in Carthage Jail. Words cannot express the brutality and suffering the Saints had endured.



Now on this 24th of July in 1849, free at last from the mobbings, they planned to celebrate.⁸

Everything the Saints owned would come across a thousand miles (1,600 km) of desert by handcart or covered wagon. It would be 20 more years before the railroad came as far as Salt Lake City. With almost nothing to work with, they determined that the celebration would be a grand expression of their feelings.

They built a bowery on Temple Square. They erected a flagpole 104 feet (32 m) tall. They made an enormous national flag 65 feet (20 m) in

length and unfurled it at the top of this liberty pole.

It may seem puzzling, incredible almost beyond belief, that for the theme of this first celebration they chose patriotism and loyalty to that same government which had rejected and failed to assist them. What could they have been thinking of? If you can understand why, you will understand the power of the teachings of Christ.

Their brass band played as President Brigham Young led a grand procession to Temple Square. He was followed by the Twelve Apostles and the Seventy.

Then followed 24 young men

dressed in white pants; black coats; white scarves on their right shoulders; coronets, or crowns, on their heads; and a sheathed sword at their left sides. In their right hand, of all things, each carried a copy of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. The Declaration of Independence was read by one of those young men.

Next came 24 young women dressed in white, blue scarves on their right shoulders and white roses on their heads. Each carried a Bible and a Book of Mormon.

Almost but not quite as amazing as their choice of patriotism for a theme was what came next: 24 aged sires (as they were called) led by patriarch Isaac Morley. They were known as the Silver Greys—all 60 years of age or older. Each carried a staff painted red with white ribbon floating at the top. One carried the Stars and Stripes. These men were a symbol of the priesthood, which was “from the beginning before the world was”⁹ and had been restored in this dispensation.

The Saints knew that the Lord had told them to be “subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.”¹⁰ That commandment, revealed then, is true now of our members in every nation. We are to be law-abiding, worthy citizens.

The Lord told them, “I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose.”¹¹

And in another verse, the Lord told them that “it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another.”¹² They were therefore anti-slavery. This was a very sore spot with the settlers in Missouri.

And so on that day of celebration in 1849, “Elder Phineas Richards came forward in behalf of the twenty-four aged sires, and read their loyal and patriotic address.”¹³ He spoke of the need for them to teach patriotism to their



children and to love and honor freedom. After he briefly recited the perils that they had come through, he said:

“Brethren and friends, we who have lived to three-score years, have beheld the government of the United States in its glory, and know that the outrageous cruelties we have suffered proceeded from a corrupted and degenerate administration, while the pure principles of our boasted Constitution remain unchanged. . . .

“ . . . As we have inherited the spirit of liberty and the fire of patriotism from our fathers, so let them descend [unchanged] to our posterity.”¹⁴

One would think that, compelled by force of human nature, the Saints would seek revenge, but something much stronger than human nature prevailed.

The Apostle Paul explained:

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. . . .

“ . . . We have the mind of Christ.”¹⁵

That Spirit defined those early members of the Church as followers of Christ.

If you can understand a people so long-suffering, so tolerant, so forgiving, so Christian after what they had

suffered, you will have unlocked the key to what a Latter-day Saint is. Rather than being consumed with revenge, they were anchored to revelation. Their course was set by the teachings still found today in the Old and the New Testaments, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.

If you can understand why they would celebrate as they did, you can understand why we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in the principles of the gospel.

The Book of Mormon teaches, “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.”¹⁶

And so today in these strangely perilous times, in the true Church of Jesus Christ¹⁷ we teach and live the principles of His gospel.

Three things about that 1849 commemoration were both symbolic and prophetic: first, that the young men carried the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence; next, that each young woman carried the Bible and the Book of Mormon; and finally, that the old men—the Silver Greys—were honored in the parade.

After the program they had a feast at makeshift tables. Several hundred gold-rush travelers and 60 Indians were invited to join them.

Then they went back to work.

President Young had said, “If the people of the United States will let us alone for ten years we will ask no odds of them.”¹⁸

Eight years to the day after the 1849 celebration, the Saints were in Big Cottonwood Canyon to celebrate another 24th of July. Four horsemen rode in to report that an army 2,500 soldiers strong was on the plains. The army of the United States, commanded by Colonel Albert Sydney Johnston, was ordered by President

James Buchanan to crush a nonexistent Mormon rebellion.

The Saints broke camp and headed for home to prepare their defenses. Rather than flee, this time President Young declared, “We have transgressed no law, and we have no occasion to do so, neither do we intend to; but as for any nation’s coming to destroy this people, God Almighty being my helper, they cannot come here.”¹⁹

My great-grandparents buried a child on the trail from Far West, when they were driven to Nauvoo, and another at Winter Quarters, when they were driven west.

Another great-grandmother, a teenager, was pushing a handcart along the south banks of the Platte River. They sang:

*We’ll find the place which God for us prepared,
Far away in the West,
Where none shall come to hurt or make afraid;
There the Saints will be blessed.*²⁰

Across the river they could see the sun glinting on the weapons of the soldiers of the army.²¹

In St. Louis my great-grandmother bought a little enameled pin of the American flag. She wore it on her dress for the rest of her life.

Neither mobbings nor the army could turn the Saints aside from what they knew to be true. A settlement was negotiated, and the Utah War (later called Buchanan’s Blunder) was over.

We are guided by the same revelations and led by a prophet. When the Prophet Joseph Smith died, another took his place. The order of succession continues today.

Six months ago at general conference, Thomas S. Monson was sustained as the 16th President of the Church, just five months before his 81st birthday. He succeeded President Gordon B. Hinckley, who died in his 98th year.



The senior leaders of the Church will virtually always be seasoned by decades of preparation.

President Monson is ideally suited for the challenges of our day. He is sustained by two counselors and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—all prophets, seers, and revelators.

That same Lucifer who was cast out of our Father’s presence is still at work. He, with the angels who followed him, will trouble the work of the Lord and destroy it if he can.

But we will stay on course. We will anchor ourselves as families and as a church to these principles and ordinances. Whatever tests lie ahead, and they will be many, we must remain faithful and true.

I bear witness of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, that They live, that Thomas S. Monson is called of God by prophecy.

“The standard of truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can

stop the work from progressing.”²² Today the sun never sets on congregations of the Latter-day Saints. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See 2 Timothy 3:1–7.
2. Articles of Faith 1:3.
3. D&C 121:1–2.
4. See D&C 101:86–88.
5. *History of the Church*, 3:175.
6. Martin Van Buren, quoted in Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (1884), 77.
7. Quoted in *Biography*, 152–53.
8. See *Biography*, 95–107.
9. D&C 76:13.
10. Articles of Faith 1:12.
11. D&C 101:80.
12. D&C 101:79.
13. *Biography*, 100.
14. Phineas Richards, in *Biography*, 102–4.
15. 1 Corinthians 2:14, 16.
16. 2 Nephi 25:26.
17. See D&C 1:30.
18. Brigham Young, “Remarks,” *Deseret News*, Sept. 23, 1857, 228.
19. *Deseret News*, Sept. 23, 1857, 228.
20. “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 30.
21. See “By Handcart to Utah: The Account of C. C. A. Christensen,” *Nebraska History*, winter 1985, 342.
22. *History of the Church*, 4:540.