

Joseph Smith—the Chosen of God and the Friend of Man

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My beloved brethren and sisters, this is a humbling moment. I have been very much touched and impressed by the singing of this beautiful chorale, by the inspiring and moving prayer by Brother Porter. In fact, coming at the end of the trail, as it were, as far as campus activities are concerned, I seem to have the yearning of the poet, somewhat paraphrased:

*Backward, turn backward, oh time, in thy flight.
Make me a freshman again—just for tonight.*
[Elisabeth Akers Allen, “Rock Me to Sleep”]

Brothers and sisters, I sincerely pray that the Spirit of the Lord will be with us in rich abundance as it has been thus far, that the things I say may be edifying, uplifting, and worth your coming here this morning.

There was a man who was invited to a masquerade ball. He decided he would go in an unusual costume, so he rented a costume of the sectarian’s idea of the devil. As he walked to the place where the masquerade ball was being held, rain began to fall. He darted into the first open door available along the street, which happened to be the door leading into a church. The minister was in the pulpit, and he was haranguing his audience against that fellow,

the evil one. He looked up from his text, and there standing in the doorway in the foyer was the fellow he had been talking against. He immediately made a hurried exit right through the plate-glass window at the back. The audience, wondering why the pastor had made such a hurried exit, looked back and saw the devil standing there in all of his diabolical glee. That particular church was evacuated in record time—all but the heavyset lady who found it difficult to get out of the pew. She finally made her way to the aisle and was trying to hurry to the exit when she fell flat on her face. The devil, gallant fellow that he turned out to be, came over to help her up. As she looked into his diabolical face, fear and consternation written all over hers, she blurted out, “I’ve been a member of this church for the last thirty years, but I’ve really been on your side all the time.”

As President George A. Smith often said, he knew a lot of Saints in pioneer days that served the Lord like the very devil. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught us how to serve the Lord as the Lord would have us serve him. In fact,

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he said if we aren't drawing near the Lord in principle, we are going from him and drawing towards the devil.

The Prophet's Friendliness

There wasn't anything that was so dear to the heart of the Prophet Joseph Smith as friendship. How the Prophet Joseph loved his friends! President Brigham Young said that August day of 1844: "Joseph so loved this people that he gave his life for them. He loved them unto death. You did not know it until after his death" (see *Documentary History of the Church*, 7:240). As the Prophet was leaving Nauvoo to go to Carthage, he stopped before the temple, which was up one story, looked over the city that housed the Saints that he loved, and he exclaimed, "This is the loveliest place and the best people under the heavens; little do they know the trials that await them" (see *Documentary History of the Church*, 6:554).

He could see no fault in the Church. He loved the majority of the Church members so well that he wanted to be resurrected with them. He was not concerned whether they were resurrected in heaven or in hell. In fact, he was to say that if we find ourselves in hell, we will turn the devils out of doors and make a heaven of it. Wherever the Saints should be Joseph knew there would be a good society.

Joseph loved the people. He ended a letter to a new convert in words something like these: "I love your soul and the souls of all men, and do all I can to bring them salvation." The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that "love is one of the chief characteristics of Diety, and ought to be manifested by those who aspire to be the sons of God. A man filled with the love of God, is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 174). He loved the Saints, but he was not blind to their misgivings or their shortcomings. During the last conference address he gave in mortality,

he said, "I love you all; but I hate some of your deeds. I am your best friend, and if persons miss their mark it is their own fault. If I reprove a man, and he hates me, he is a fool; for I love all men, especially these my brethren and sisters" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 361).

The Prophet was not too concerned as to a man's character if he was his friend. He said, "I will be a friend to him, and preach the Gospel . . . to him, . . . helping him out of his difficulties." Joseph also taught, "Friendship is one of the grand fundamental principles of "Mormonism"; [it is designed] to revolutionize and civilize the world, and cause wars and contentions to cease and men to become friends and brothers" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 316). The spirit and practice of friendship, my brothers and sisters, is contagious. Said the Prophet Joseph Smith:

It is a time-honored adage that love begets love. Let us pour forth love—show forth our kindness unto all mankind, and the Lord will reward us with everlasting increase; cast our bread upon the waters and we shall receive it after many days, increased to a hundredfold. Friendship is like Brother Turley in his blacksmith shop welding iron to iron; it unites the human family with its happy influence. [*Documentary History of the Church*, 5:517]

The spirit of friendship is the essence of charity, which Moroni defined as the pure love of Christ. Channing Pollock once called love "friendship put to music" and said, "I thank God for love of life."

Joseph taught, "I do not dwell on your faults, and you shall not upon mine"—good counsel for us all. He said, "Charity, which is love, covereth a multitude of sins, and I have covered all the faults among you, but the prettiest thing in the world is to have not faults at all. We should cultivate a meek, quiet, and peaceable spirit" (*Documentary History of the Church*, 5:401).

The Prophet Joseph Smith despised sham. Pretense to him was folly. Once he said, "I love that man better who swears a stream as long as my arm, yet deals justice to his neighbors and mercifully deals his substance to the poor, than the smooth-faced hypocrite. I do not want you to think that I'm very righteous, for I am not. There was one good man, and his name was Jesus" (*Documentary History of the Church*, 5:401).

There came to Nauvoo a Baptist priest to determine the piety of the Prophet Joseph. When he saw Joseph, he folded his arms and, weighing his words, uttered, "Is it possible that I now flash my optics upon a prophet, upon a man who has conversed with my Savior?"

"Yes," said the Prophet, "You've had that privilege. Now, how would you like to wrestle with me?" (*Journal of Discourses*, 3:67).

The Prophet's Forgiving Nature

Joseph Smith's forgiveness of others is impressively illustrated in an incident involving William W. Phelps. During those trying days of persecution in Missouri, Phelps apostatized and turned against the Church. He signed his name to a false affidavit that brought much suffering to the Saints and imprisoned the Prophet Joseph. In a short time he realized the error of his ways and asked forgiveness and readmittance into the Church. He wrote the Prophet:

I have seen the folly of my way and tremble at the gulf I have passed. I have done wrong, and I am sorry. The beam is in my own eye. I ask forgiveness in the name of Jesus Christ of all the Saints. For I will do right, God helping me. I want your fellowship, for we are brethren, and our communion used to be sweet. [Documentary History of the Church, 4:141-42]

The Prophet's reply reveals the admirable quality of love and forgiveness for the wayward. Wrote the Prophet in reply to William W.

Phelps's request to be readmitted into the Church:

I feel a disposition to act on your case in a manner that will meet the approbation of Jehovah, whose servant I am, and inasmuch as long-suffering, patience, and mercy have ever characterized the dealings of our Heavenly Father towards the humble and penitent, I feel disposed to copy that example, cherish the same principles and by so doing be a savior to my fellowman. Believing your confession to be real and your repentance genuine. I shall be happy once again to give you the right hand of fellowship and rejoice over the returning prodigal. Come on, dear brother, since the war is past, for friends at first are friends again at last.

[*Documentary History of the Church*, 5:162]

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "Ever keep in exercise the principle of mercy and be ready to forgive a brother on the first intimation of repentance and asking forgiveness. And should we even forgive our brother, or even our enemy, before he repents, and asks forgiveness, our Heavenly Father would be equally merciful to us" (*Documentary History of the Church*, 3:383).

Is it any wonder, my brothers and sisters, that Joseph's contemporaries, those who knew him best, were to comment as President Wilford Woodruff did: "When I look at the history of Joseph Smith, I sometimes think that he came as near following the footsteps of the Savior as anyone possibly could" (John A. Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith—Seeker After Truth*, p. 348). To bring about peace on the earth and the millennial reign of the Christ, the Prophet Joseph taught that the act of kindness must extend to the animal kingdom. Said he, "Men must become harmless before the brute creation, and when men lost their vicious dispositions and cease to destroy the animal race, the lion and the lamb can dwell together, and the suckling child can play with the serpent in

safety" (*Documentary History of the Church*, 2:271). Someone has written:

*Be kind to all dumb animals,
And give small birds a crumb;
Be kind to human bein's too,
For they are sometimes dumb.*

The Prophet's Cordial Personality

Joseph Smith possessed the secret of making friends. His radiant personality, his acceptance of man's innate goodness, and his love for all men won him many friends. Josiah Quincy was to observe that Joseph was one of the two men, among all he had ever met, who seemed best endowed with that kingly faculty which directs, as by intrinsic right, the feeble and confused souls who are looking for guidance. Parley P. Pratt described Joseph Smith as "possessing a noble boldness, an independence of character. His manner was easy and familiar, his benevolence unbounded as the ocean. Even his most bitter enemies were generally overcome if he could once get their ears" (*Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, pp. 45–46).

William Taylor, a brother of President John Taylor, was a personal companion to the Prophet Joseph Smith. These are the words that he said in describing that wonderful man Joseph:

Much has been said of his geniality and his personal magnetism. I was a witness of this. People old or young loved him and trusted him instinctively. I have never known the same joy and satisfaction in the companionship of any other person—man or woman—that I felt with him, the man who conversed with the Almighty. He was always the most companionable and lovable of men, cheerful, and jovial. [Young Women's Journal, 17:548]

Dan Jones, a mite of a man physically and a college graduate who left the field of learning to become a sailor, sailed the five oceans and had set foot in almost all of the ports. He ran a

steamboat called *The Maid of Iowa* up and down the Mississippi River, and it was seamanship that brought Dan Jones to the Prophet Joseph Smith. One day he landed a boatload of Saints in Nauvoo, and the Prophet came to the wharf to meet him. He walked up to the little captain, put his hand on his shoulder, and said, "God bless this little man." Dan Jones never forgot that benediction. He joined the Church that year to become one of the Prophet's most trusted friends. He was with his beloved Prophet in the Carthage Jail the night before the martyrdom when the Prophet asked, "Brother Jones, are you afraid to die?"

Dan Jones replied, "has it come to that, Brother Joseph? Being engaged in such a work as we're engaged in, I don't think death would have any terror for me."

The Prophet said, "Brother Jones, you shall not die, but you shall go to Wales and fulfill the mission assigned you." After the martyrdom Dan Jones sailed for Wales, where he performed a most successful mission, setting an all-time record for convert baptisms. He testified, "I have come in obedience to the counsel of the martyred prophet, as a messenger to my native land to bear testimony of the work for which his brother Hyrum died, and which he sealed with his own blood." (See Thomas C. Romney, *The Gospel in Action*, p. 89.)

The Prophet Joseph on one occasion was to say, "I'm not an enemy of mankind; I am a friend of mankind. I have no enemies but for the gospel's sake." The Lord promised the Prophet Joseph that he could have anything he desired, and the Prophet was to say, "I have been afraid to ask God to kill my enemies lest some of them, perchance, repent."

During the troublesome days at Far West, Missouri, there came to the home of the Prophet's parents eight men from Daviess County, Missouri, who believed the lies circulated about Joseph Smith and the Mormons. They had come to kill the Mormon leader. Mother Smith greeted them at the door and

invited them to come in. They refused to sit down; in fact, they informed the mother of the Prophet, “We have come to kill him.”

Mother Smith was to say, “If you were to see Joseph you would not want to kill him.” At that particular point the Prophet Joseph Smith entered the room, and Mother Smith introduced the eight men to him. They stared at him in mute silence. The Prophet smiled, extended his hand, and invited them to be seated. His friendly, cordial manner convinced them that he was guilty neither of murder nor of any other crime. A pleasant half hour was spent, during which time the Prophet explained his views, his feelings, his mission, the purpose of the Church, and the brutal treatment he and the Saints had so unjustly received. He then excused himself, stating that he must be on his way home. Immediately two of the men sprang to their feet and offered to escort him home as they considered it not safe for him to travel alone. He thanked them but did not accept their offer. As the eight men were leaving the house, Mother Smith overheard their departing words. One said, “Did you not feel strange when Smith took you by the hand?”

Another man replied, “I could not move. I would not harm a hair of that man’s head for all the world.”

The third one said, “I never saw a more harmless, innocent appearing man than the Mormon Prophet.”

“Yes, indeed,” said the fourth, “that story about him killing those men is a lie, but they’ll never fool me again.”

The Prophet’s Love for His Enemies

The Savior, in his inspiring Sermon on the Mount, taught, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:43–45).

The Prophet Joseph Smith practiced this most difficult of all the Savior’s teachings. The Prophet was betrayed into the hands of the mob-militia in Missouri. He was court-martialed and sentenced to be shot. One of the officers of the mob-militia, Moses Wilson, came to one of the Prophet’s friends, Lyman Wight, and tried to bribe him into testifying against Joseph. He said, “We don’t want to kill you, but we have one thing against you, and that is you are too friendly with Joseph Smith. We believe him to be a rascal, but you’re a fine fellow. If you will swear against him, we will spare your life and give you any office you want. If you won’t you’ll be shot at nine o’clock.”

Wight looked Wilson squarely in the eye and said, “Wilson, you have your men entirely wrong—both in regard to myself and to Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith is the most philanthropic man I ever saw. He is not your enemy; he is a friend of mankind and a maker of peace. In fact, he is the best friend you have, for if it hadn’t been for Joseph Smith, you would have been in hell long ago. I’d have put ya there myself by cuttin’ your throat, and Joseph is the only man on earth that could stop me from doin’ it. You can just thank Joseph for being alive” (*Documentary History of the Church*, 3:436–37).

Strangely enough, my brothers and sisters, as Parley P. Pratt stated: “If Joseph could get the ears of his most devout enemies he generally made friends of them.” Years afterward, Moses Wilson was to say, “Joseph Smith was a most remarkable man. I carried him a prisoner in chains to my house in Independence, Missouri, and he hadn’t been there two hours before my wife loved him better than she loved me.”

After being kidnapped by two sheriffs and brutally treated by them, his life constantly being threatened, the Prophet Joseph was

rescued by his friends. Instead of his being escorted across the Mississippi River into Missouri, as the sheriffs intended to do, he was brought to Nauvoo. While in Nauvoo, the prophet took the two sheriffs to his home, placed them at the head of his table, and his wife waited on them as though they were the most honored guests that had ever graced her house. Joseph said, "I have brought these men to Nauvoo, not as prisoners in chains, but as prisoners of kindness. I have treated them kindly. I have had the privilege of returning them good for evil" (*Documentary History of the Church*, 5:467).

The Prophet Joseph Smith was quick to express his gratitude for any little act of kindness or gift given him. In fact, he was to say that ingratitude was one of the most offensive sins of his age. On one occasion his friends gave him \$64.50, and this is what the Prophet Joseph said: "My heart swells with gratitude inexpressible when I realize the great condescension of my Heavenly Father in opening the hearts of these, my beloved brethren, to administer so liberally to my wants."

While in the Liberty Jail he received letters from his wife, Emma, and other friends which certainly gave him courage to face the loneliness of imprisonment for Christ's sake. Then he wrote, "One token of friendship from any source whatever awakens and calls into action every sympathetic feeling." The Lord assured his Prophet while in the Liberty Jail, "Thy friends do stand by thee, and they shall hail thee again with warm hearts and friendly hands" (D&C 121:9).

When the enemies of the Prophet Joseph were seeking his life during the Nauvoo period, the Prophet was forced to go into hiding, and on one occasion some of his friends visited him. After their departure he wrote, "How good and glorious it has seemed unto me to find pure and holy friends who are faithful, just, and true, and whose hearts fail them not and whose knees are confirmed and do not

falter. These I have met in prosperity, and they were my friends, and now I meet them in adversity, and they are still my warmer friends" (*Documentary History of the Church*, 5:107). The Prophet Joseph sums up most impressively why they were his friends:

[First and foremost] *these love the God that I serve; [secondly] they love the truths that I promulgate; [thirdly] they love those virtuous, and those holy doctrines that I cherish in my bosom with the warmest feelings of my heart. I love friendship and truth; I love virtue and law; I love the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; and they are my brethren, and I shall live; and because I live they shall live also.* [*Documentary History of the Church*, 5:108–9]

As he prayed for his friends, the still, small voice whispered to his soul, "These, that share your toils with such faithful hearts, shall reign with you in the kingdom of their God" (*Documentary History of the Church*, 5:109). What a glorious reward of friendship! What wouldn't one of us give to have the privilege of being with the Prophet Joseph Smith in the kingdom of God?

The Principle of Love

While conversing with his cousin George A. Smith on one occasion, the Prophet wrapped his arms around him and said with emotion, "George A., I love you as I love my own soul!" This left his cousin speechless. In fact, George A. said, "I felt so affected I could hardly speak." In a few moments, after regaining his composure, he solemnly said, "I hope, Brother Joseph, that my whole life and actions will prove my feelings and the depth of my affection for you" (*Documentary History of the Church*, 5:39).

Sectarian priests often asked concerning Joseph, "How can this babbler get so many followers around him and retain them?" The Prophet answered, "It's because I possess the

principle of love. All I have to offer the world is a good heart and a good hand" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 313). Joseph's love and concern for his brethren was shown in action. Word came to Nauvoo on one occasion of a poor man who had lost his house by fire. Nearly all the brethren said they were sorry for the man. The Prophet Joseph Smith put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a five-dollar gold piece and said, "I feel sorry for this brother to the amount of five dollars. How much do you feel sorry?"

Phineas H. Young, an older brother of the Prophet Brigham Young, was once away in Tiffin, Ohio. While there he wrote Willard Richards, the Prophet Joseph's secretary, and said, "I long to see the day when I can again visit my brethren and see the Lord's Prophet, and hear the words of life sweetly distilling from his lips. Give my love to Brother Joseph when you see him. Tell him I'd come to the Rocky Mountains to see him and fight my way through an army of wildcats and Missouri wolves and live on skunks the whole journey" ("Journal History of the Church," 14 December 1842).

Well, meeting the Prophet Joseph was an experience, my friends, and those who had had that opportunity never forgot. Amos M. Lyman traveled some six hundred miles to see the Prophet Joseph Smith. He was the only member of his family to join the Church. He arrived at the John Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio, and received employment working on the farm for ten dollars a month. Shortly after his coming, the prophet Joseph returned from Missouri, and young Lyman had the opportunity of meeting him. The impression the Prophet made on the new convert was stamped indelibly upon his mind, heart, and soul through the years: "When he grasped me by the hand in that cordial way, known to those who had met him in the honest simplicity of truth, I felt as one of old in the presence of the Lord, my strength seemed to be gone so that it required

an effort on my part to stand on my feet; but in all of this there was no fear, but the serenity and peace of heaven pervaded my soul and the still small voice of the Spirit whispered its living testimony in the depths of my soul, where it has ever remained, that he was a man of God" (*Deseret News*, 8:117).

Now, the climax of all the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith on love and friendship: "Until we have obtained perfect love we are liable to fall, and when we have the testimony that our names are sealed in the Lamb's Book of Life we have perfect love, and then it isn't possible for false Christs to deceive us" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 9).

One of the most touching scenes in the life of the Prophet Joseph (and one of the most thrilling, for it demonstrates the unbounded love of his followers for their beloved Prophet) was when, in the summer of 1843, the Prophet Joseph Smith rode triumphantly into Nauvoo after he had been kidnapped by a couple of sheriffs. His friends had come to the rescue, and he entered Nauvoo in triumph. The Saints had been notified the day before of his coming, and almost all the people came out meet him, with his wife, Emma, and his brother, Hyrum in the lead. After embracing his wife and his brother Hyrum, he mounted his favorite horse, Old Charlie. The band struck up "Hail, Columbia," and the procession started into town. Besides a long line of carriages and persons on horseback, the streets were lined with people whose countenances were joyous and full of satisfaction to see their beloved Prophet once more safe. The Prophet was greeted with cheers from the people and the booming of gun and cannon.

At his home he was embraced by his mother, with tears of joy streaming down her cheeks, while his little children clung to him with feelings of enthusiastic and enraptured pleasure. His little son Fred exclaimed, "Pa, the Missourians won't take you away again, will they?" His friends from out of town looked on

with amazement and astonishment, but with unconcealed pleasure at the loving attachment of the Prophet's family and his friends toward him. His friends were loath to depart. One can feel the Prophet's love for his friends as he blessed them: "I thank you for your kindness and love for me. I bless you all, in the name of Jesus Christ."

Josiah Quincy spent two days in Nauvoo. He followed the Prophet Joseph around. He noted the power and influence of the Prophet as he walked among the people. It was then that Quincy said, "General Smith, it seems to

me that you have too much power to be safely trusted in one man."

Joseph replied, "In your hands, or that of any other man, so much power would no doubt be dangerous. I am the only man in the world whom it would be safe to trust with it. Remember, I am a prophet." And in all the solemnity of my soul I testify to you that he is and was a prophet, a servant of the Most High God, a seer of God, a revealer of truth, and a friend to man, in the sacred name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.