

Called of God by Prophecy

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We're very happy this morning, Sister Packer and I, to be here at Brigham Young University, where we have only three children now attending, down from four. That's a deficiency, I think, that as the years unfold we can correct, Brother Lewis; there'll be others coming along, and we're happy to have them here.

I'm conscious that this is a devotional assembly, and I would ask for an interest in your faith and prayers this morning as I discuss with you a very sacred subject, one that fills me with gratitude each time I contemplate it. I'd like to share with you some thoughts and some experiences relating to a question that was asked by Moroni, the ancient prophet, when he said,

Has the day of miracles ceased?

Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved? [Moro. 7:35–36]

This ancient prophet answered his own question with these words:

Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore, if these things have ceased, wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain.

For no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name; wherefore, if these things have ceased, then faith has ceased also; and awful is the state of man, for they are as though there had been no redemption made. [Moro. 7:37–38]

The Lord, during his ministry, promised that these signs shall follow them that believe:

In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. [Mark 16:17–18]

Boyd K. Packer was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this address was given at Brigham Young University on 27 March 1973.

Now, such miracles have always been a witness of his Church on the earth, and they're known among us—I could say even common among us—but they're not often talked about. We regard them with humility and with unmeasured reverence. It isn't about those miracles that I would speak to you this morning. It's about another miracle, a very quiet one, one that's constantly with us, and always apparent, and yet oftentimes ignored.

In a recent testimony meeting, a friend of mine told of a conversation he'd had that week with a fellow employee in a business establishment. My friend had regarded him as an active member, a faithful member of the Church always, and yet in this conversation he made the comment that he didn't believe that there was much inspiration in the way people were called to office in the Church. He said they're called from desperation or something else, but he said there couldn't be much inspiration in it. I don't know whether that referred to a call he'd received himself for which he felt unworthy; or perhaps he was offended by someone who was called and who was, he thought, ineligible; or maybe he referred to one of the few—and there are a few—who receive a call in the Church unwillingly and then respond and really fail to perform. To him, and to you, I want to quote a verse from the Doctrine and Covenants, and I suppose this is the theme of what I have on my mind this morning. The Lord is speaking:

I command and men obey not; I revoke and they receive not the blessing.

Then they say in their hearts: This is not the work of the Lord, for his promises are not fulfilled. But wo unto such, for their reward lurketh beneath, and not from above. [D&C 58:32–33]

“Now We'll See”

Now, it's about the quiet miracle relating to the calling of members of the Church to office and their response to that call that I would like to talk today. That's a miracle I never fail to be

humbled by: that process by which one is designated in the Church to receive a call, and the witness that he receives as he answers it. The suggestion that there's no inspiration in it is something that we have to contemplate.

I learned years ago a very important lesson. I think it was the second time I'd ever met President Lee; I had been introduced to him once before. I was serving as a member of a stake high council, and on one occasion the stake president presented in our meeting the name of a man to be called to a position of leadership in the stake. I was teaching seminary at the time, and Brother Leon Strong, also a seminary teacher, had talked to me a time or two about this man. We'd commented on what an able man he was, and how sad it was that he couldn't do more than he did because of a handicap relating to his wife. She had one personality trait that I think could be characterized by the term *malicious*; I think that identifies what it was.

When the stake president presented the name of this man for a presiding office in the stake and called for a vote, the two of us cast negative votes. That's rather unusual. The president talked it over for a few minutes and then said that he felt he'd like to proceed anyway, and he asked if we would sustain him in issuing this call. Immediately the issue changed. In my mind, then, it was a vote to sustain the stake president, not necessarily a vote for this man to office; and when he called for a vote, Brother Strong and I joined the other ten members of the stake high council affirmatively, approving the call of this man to office.

When our stake conference was held, a month or two later, when the ordinations were to take place, Elder Harold B. Lee, of the Council of the Twelve, was the visitor. After the conference, we'd assembled in the stake center for the ordinations. Elder Lee had ordained a bishop and his counselors and some others, and then this man was called forth to be ordained by the member of the Council of the

Twelve. Brother Strong nudged me—we were sitting together—and with a smile on his face he leaned over and said, “Well, Brother Packer, now we’ll see whether this church is run by revelation.”

Elder Lee put his hands on the head of this man and began the usual introductory words to an ordination, then hesitated. Then he said words to this effect: “The other blessings relating to your activities and life and occupation that you’ve heard pronounced upon the others here apply to you as well, but there is a special blessing.” And then that man received the longest blessing, the most pointed of them all; and, in reality, it was not a blessing for him but a blessing for his wife. It was a very interesting thing to see.

Immediately, when the meeting was over, I went to Brother Lee and said, “Did you know this brother before you ordained him?”

“No,” he said. “I didn’t know him. I think I hadn’t seen him till I came into this room.”

I said, “He received a very unusual blessing.”

And Elder Lee said, “Yes, I felt that.”

Later, the president of the stake explained: “I meant to talk to Elder Lee about that and tell him that here was a man that had need of a special blessing, but in the press of business we just didn’t have time.” And so Brother Strong was right. That day we did see whether this church was run by revelation or not.

The Miracle of a Mission Call

Recently I had the privilege of organizing the six hundredth stake in the Church, in Southampton, England. Four hundred of the six hundred have been organized in the last twenty years, and nearly half of them have been organized since I was called an Assistant to the Twelve in 1961. Now, with the Church growing that way, those of us who are members of the Council of the Twelve are employed almost constantly on our stake conference assignments in the organization and

reorganization of the stakes somewhere in the world. It never fails to be a very interesting and a very inspiring experience. An assignment I would not cherish, I would not seek, save it were that the principle of revelation is a practical, operative principle and can be and is constantly employed.

Think of going somewhere in the world and arriving on a Saturday afternoon. Sometimes when planes are delayed we come late and the meetings have to be rearranged. And yet, the following morning there must be new leadership called, people that we’ve never seen, sometimes a language barrier. If we were doing it man’s way, there would be brochures of experience, there would be interviews and reinterviews, there would be times of study, interviewing many who knew the individual, and so on. But it doesn’t work that way; it can’t, for there isn’t time. The world is too large, and there are too many stakes and too many places to be. It’s a marvelous thing to be able to go before the Lord, to present a simple question, and to get a direct, positive, unmistakable answer. I’m ever humbled by that. This is a miracle, this process of the call and release of members in the Church.

What kind of miraculous persuasion is it that would have a young man, vigorous, active, interested in life itself—at the one time when he, by virtue of normal appraisal, ought to be more interested in material things—be willing to respond to a call to serve on a mission, pay his own way, give a tithing of his life, two years, preaching the gospel? Miracle? Oh, yes; but we have seventeen thousand of them.

You know, as I was presiding over the New England Mission, we had two missionaries that were two thousand miles away from mission headquarters. And I thought one day, “That’s an interesting process. You take a common, garden-variety, teen-age young man; you call him on a mission; you set him apart; you give him another teen-ager as a companion; and you send him out someplace with a hundred

dollars a month provided by himself. You then give him a simple list of instructions: no dating, rigid mission rules—spend all your time preaching and proselyting, and so on.” Well, it’s insane when you think about it. Ofttimes too, he’s provided with an automobile. It couldn’t possibly work. The only justification is that it does.

The two missionaries, two thousand miles away, could be depended upon because somehow they’d come to know that it’s their church too, and he’s their Lord, and this process of sustaining—the process, the simple process, of revelation relating to the call—is an operative principle of life in this church.

What is it that would cause a man to set aside his personal pursuits, to interrupt his business or professional activities, to yield in political preference, often to give up seniority, often retirement benefits, to go anywhere on earth, without question and without any unusual compensation or persuasion—no compensation materially—simply to preside over a mission?

I recall a few years ago I was supervising the missions in Western Europe. We needed a mission president with a certain language proficiency. Several names were brought forward, but none of them seemed to be right. Then one of the Brethren remembered that he had met a man—I think it was in Korea—several years before. He was a member of the Church, who was in the customs service. Somehow just the mention of that name and the Spirit confirmed. He was called, by virtue of the time pressures, by telephone to preside over the mission. I visited him a few weeks later. He was living in Washington, D.C. He was within reach of the number one office in his category. His lifetime had been spent progressing through the ranks, thinking that perhaps one day he would stand at the head of that division. His senior officer had indicated that because of a health problem he would retire early and that this man was

being recommended for that position. It was just at that time that the telephone call came.

I wanted to get acquainted with him and was invited to stay overnight. He brought me a message from his superior. The message was this: “Tell that Brother Packer of yours that you’re no missionary; I’ve worked with you for thirty years and you haven’t converted me. Tell them they’re making a mistake. And you’re making a mistake. You’re a fool.” (I’m leaving out one word.) “If you will give up your retirement and all that you’ve reached for—why? Why would you do it?”

Simple answer: he’d been called. We live to know, in this church, that the response to a call does not depend on the testimony and witness of the one who delivers the call. It depends, rather, on the testimony and witness of the one who receives it.

It was very interesting. We were looking for a man who spoke French. It was not until after he was in the mission field, and we had some opportunities and responsibilities relating to some of the problems of some members we had in Spain, that we discovered that he wrote and spoke Spanish fluently. I suppose if we’d searched through the Church for a man who spoke French, spoke Spanish, and had had some diplomatic experience, particularly as it related to customs work, we would have gone afar in the world; and yet all it was was the chance memory of one of the Brethren that he’d met a man a few years before in Korea.

There are literally innumerable examples of this in the process of calling people to office. Now we’re in the process of calling mission presidents, and I suppose in many homes there’s a sweet wife who will give her husband a hug when he says: “I had a call from the Brethren. They want me to go to Argentina.” (Japan, Germany, Denver, Texas, Finland, wherever.) And her answer, “We’ll go with you, my dear, and we’ll sustain you.” When the protest comes, “What about this, or what about that?” “No worry about that; they’re just

material things. We'll come home in the years ahead, as we're released, and pick up the pieces as we can."

A Spiritual Prompting

Now with each call in the Church there comes, it seems to me, three things: First, something by way of preparation, not infrequently a spiritual prompting. On these weekends when we call a new stake president, it's an interesting thing to say, "President, when did you first learn of this call?" knowing full well that the enunciation of that to him didn't come from me. He then will tell those sacred experiences, that we'll not repeat here, about how he knew, so that he could prepare for this call.

A Test

The next thing usually related to a call is a trial. It's like a test, perhaps like a test you receive at school—and incidentally, like the tests you receive at school, you can fail them if you will.

I might mention here an experience of a young couple, graduates of this university. This young lady and her husband (they had two children, a tiny girl and a baby two weeks old) graduated, as many of you will, and he had a business opportunity in Salt Lake City. So they moved to Salt Lake City.

They, of course, were active in the Church, and Bishop Bowles—it was in the Belvedere Ward—called them in the first week they were there. The bishop said, "We're building a new building and we need all the help we can get. Are you willing to serve?" They both said they would. And he said, "Would you like to suggest where you'd like to serve?"

That's a little unusual in the Church, but she was happy for that. She was a teacher. In fact, she taught here for a quarter or two. She said she'd like to teach. She'd like to teach in the Sunday School or in the MIA. So the following Sunday she was sustained as a second counselor in the presidency of the Relief

Society! Now, she protested and used the word *shocked*, and this is a quote: "That organization is for my mother, not for me." She said she had no experience, and I quote again, "And I have no desire to learn."

Well, the bishop prevailed, as bishops will, and she answered the call. They held Relief Society in a dismal room in the basement of the chapel, because of the remodeling and construction. It was in the furnace room. While the furnace was on it was terrible, and when the furnace was off it was intolerable. Her children caught cold. On at least two occasions she went to the bishop and asked to be released. On both occasions the bishop said he'd think about it.

Finally, she was in a very serious automobile accident. After some period of treatment, she was recovering at home. Part of the injury was a terrible laceration of her face. This became infected and they called a doctor one Sunday night. He made some preparation for some further attention, but he said, "I think we can't touch this surgically; it's too close to the nerve in your face." He gave her what attention he could and explained how grave the situation was.

It was as the doctor was leaving that late Sunday night when the bishop appeared at the door, after a long busy day, as Sundays will be for a bishop. He said, "I was just on my way home from some interviews and saw the light on and wondered if there was trouble here." This woman, in her agony, when the bishop said, "Is there anything we can do for you?" answered from her pain and with tears, "Yes, Bishop. *Now*, will you release me from the Relief Society?" He said he would pray about it. And the answer came back: "Sister Spafford, I still don't get the feeling that you should be released from the Relief Society."

This great and lovely woman, who for many years has presided over our Relief Society in the Church, was tested in those early days of her life. I think that something like that can

come to many of us, most of us, when we're being tested, as it were.

I recall an experience I had on one occasion as a young man in the military service. I thought about it recently when we've had the repatriation of some of our military men from overseas. I'd been away from home about four years. We were given points. You got a point for every month you'd been overseas, and a point for the number of battles you had been in, and so on, and high-point man went back to the States first.

Of course there were millions of men to be brought back, and shipping was taxed, so there was nothing more important than to look at the bulletin board and see the points come down. At once you were earning more, and someday you got to the point where you knew the next ship in would be the one that would take you home. I saw that on the bulletin board and thanked the Lord that I could go home finally.

It was that day that my commanding officer called me in and told me we were opening a new flight at Osaka and that I was to be the operations officer. Well, I expressed myself to him. I might have been court-martialed for what I said. I think I'll even admit I used a few scriptural terms out of context. In fact, perhaps upside down and backwards. He listened very patiently, and when it was all over with he said, "Well, that's all right, Packer, you're still going." And so it was.

That afternoon, on a C-47, with all my gear and the others who'd been assigned, I sat bitterly grumbling over the fact that it would take months again, that it wouldn't be just an assignment of a week or two. Then I challenged, I think, the Lord, saying, "Why is it?" I had never wanted anything so much as I wanted to be home. I'd prayed for it, I'd tried to earn it, I'd tried to deserve it, I'd tried to behave myself, and then, within grasp, the very thing I wanted most was denied me.

Somehow, I don't remember how, I took hold of myself; but looking back now, I can

say the Lord was answering my prayers then. There came from that experience, from things that happened in those few months, lessons essential to the preparation for the calling that is now mine. I couldn't see that far ahead, but by those tests or trials that we receive, oftentimes the Lord will prepare for us what he has in mind.

A Sustaining Power

Now, the third thing, with reference to this quiet miracle, is that with the setting apart comes an endowment of power and inspiration, a sustaining power that will secure the success of anyone called to office in this church. Now, the Lord knows what the Lord knows, and he said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isa. 55:8). Sometimes we challenge, in our own hearts, when the Lord gives us an experience. We wonder, and yet there's that quiet miracle.

"In this Church," as President Clark said, "one takes the place to which one has been duly called, which place one neither seeks, nor does one decline" (*Conference Report*, October 1950).

Then there's the Article of Faith: "We believe that a man must,"—not *could be*, or *might*, or *sometimes is*—"We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands, by those who are in authority to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof."

Now, the world doesn't see that. Some members of the Church don't see that. This man who said that we're called by desperation or something else is a man who is not possessed of the Spirit. For "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" (1 Cor. 2:14). And I have come to know that whenever you find criticism, and cynicism, and ridicule, over something as sacred as this, invariably also you find disobedience. Keep in

mind that word. "I command and men obey not; I revoke and they receive not the blessing. Then they say in their hearts: This is not the work of the Lord, for his promises are not fulfilled" (D&C 58:32–33).

I affirm to you, my young brethren and sisters, that that principle of revelation is a constantly operative principle, and I close with one other experience.

Each of Us Can Have that Spirit

I was organizing a stake in Samoa. There appeared before us in the interviews these wonderful Samoan brethren. One of them, a branch president, stood there—white shirt and tie, lava-lava tied around his waist, barefooted. I told him we were organizing a stake and seeking a stake president and asking his suggestions on men. He said, "Yes, I know. I've prayed about this." And he said, "I've come to know, by the voice of the Spirit, that Bishop Iona will be our new stake president."

He was right. But I wasn't anxious to have him make the announcement and so pressed him for another name.

He said, "No, just one name."

And I said, "Suppose he were not available, or not eligible. Won't you suggest another name?" He stood there for a few minutes, and then, looking at me, he said, "Elder Packer, are you asking me to go against the witness of the Spirit?" This wonderful man was possessed of that Spirit, as all of us can be, each of us answering the calls that come.

Now I plead with you, my brethren and sisters. This church is directed by a prophet of God; the principle of revelation is operative. Every week as we go out across the world, we have those experiences. We don't talk about them much. They're like the other miracles: they are the signs that follow those who believe. I pray that we will be reverently grateful for the sustaining power of the Spirit.

Jesus lives; he is the Christ. Of him I bear witness. It is taught by many that he's some influence in the far recesses of the heavens. He is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father. He is no stranger to his servants on this earth. This is his church. Of him I bear witness. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.