

# *The Lord's Strange Act*

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I am honored and grateful to have this special privilege to speak to you choice young men and wonderful young women at this great university today.

I am humbled as I stand here and subdued as I feel the spirit that radiates from you. To you fine teachers and leaders, I appreciate each one of you. My close association with some of your group who have presided over missions and in other capacities has heightened my love and respect for those who make up this incomparable body of teachers and leaders.

## **His Divine Purposes**

If I may, I would like to speak to you today on a subject I have chosen to call the Lord's strange act—“that I may bring to pass my strange act, that I may pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (D&C 95:4).

I hope to be able to help identify it for you, and also assist you to see more clearly the vital part each one of us is playing in it, and tell you how I feel we can strengthen and enhance our contribution in this great challenge destiny has brought to us.

Emerson said, “The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.” Yes, this is a great school. But it is more than a school; it is an ensign to all the world. It is one of the show

cases; it is one of the windows through which the world can view the product of the great plan of the Eternal Father. It is one of the display racks of the fruits of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The cream of the crop from the homes of faithful Latter-day Saints in this nation and many nations fills these classrooms and halls. Representatives from institutions and corporations in this land, and in many lands, come from afar to seek its products, who are spread like leaven among the nations. Yes, it is more than another school. The tithes of the faithful across the world, including those of the widows and orphans, help provide a sacred feeling that sets this school apart from other schools.

It has been a source of pride to me as I have traveled in many cities to find graduates of this great university serving in important places—not just as laborers, but as teachers, leaders, managers, professional people—rendering great service to others, not just in areas of their specialties, but radiating a feeling: a warmth of spirit and goodness of life that blesses all

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who are fortunate enough to come under their influence.

We—this Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, this school—are not just the product of those living now. We are a summation, the total of the lives and efforts of many who have played their special part in their day and in their time in the Lord’s *strange act* to bring about his purposes. As it were, we can stand on their shoulders.

Spread over many centuries, running like a golden thread in the happenings of the peoples and governments of this earth, the Lord has been bringing to pass his strange act to accomplish his divine purposes in the earth, both here and hereafter.

Daniel, prophetically looking down through the centuries, spoke briefly of the Lord’s strange act and his work in this day:

*And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.* [Daniel 2:44]

In Nephi’s great vision the Lord allowed Nephi to view some of the events of his work—his strange act—down through the centuries.

*And I looked and beheld the Redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken; and I also beheld the prophet who should prepare the way before him. And the Lamb of God went forth and was baptized of him; and after he was baptized, I beheld the heavens open, and the Holy Ghost come down out of heaven and abide upon him in the form of a dove.*

*And I beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory; and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him; and I beheld that they cast him out from among them. . . .*

*And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.*

*And after he was slain I saw the multitudes of the earth, that they were gathered together to fight against the apostles of the Lamb; for thus were the twelve called by the angel of the Lord. [1 Nephi 11:27–28,33–34]*

Because the priesthood with its keys of authority was lost to the earth with the death of Jesus and his apostles, the world went into a period it has called the Dark Ages—when the light of education and learning grew so dim, when the practice of medicine was tied with ritual and superstition, when travel was limited, and when the word of God was not really available to the common man.

This was a dark time. It continued for over a thousand years, but the predetermined plan of the Lord—his strange act—continued to take place as the chosen individuals came to earth in their time and place to play their part in his divine plan.

### **“By the Power of God”**

In about 1455 a man named Johannes Gutenberg invented printing from movable type. At the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California, I saw one of the first Bibles printed using Gutenberg’s movable type—beautiful work. Some of the word of God was beginning to be available for those who could read.

Nephi again spoke of what he saw in the vision of the future:

*And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land. [1 Nephi 13:12]*

Christopher Columbus gave credit to the Lord for his accomplishments. In a letter to the Spanish hierarchy, Columbus wrote:

*Our Lord with provident hand unlocked my mind, sent me upon the sea, and gave me fire for the deed. Those who heard of my emprise called it foolish, mocked me, and laughed. But who can doubt but that the Holy Ghost inspired me? [Jacob Wassermann, Columbus, Don Quixote of the Seas, trans. Eric Sutton (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1930), pp. 19–20]*

During the voyage, after weeks of sailing with no signs of land, mutiny raised its head. Finally, Columbus promised the captains of the Pinta and the Nina (both of whom wanted to turn back) that if no land was sighted in forty-eight hours, they would turn back. Then he went to his cabin and in his words, “prayed mightily to the Lord.” On October 12, the very next day, land was sighted.

The Lord had held this land of America from being overrun until it was time for it to take its part in his strange act. This is a promised land. The Lord through ancient prophets has said this:

*And that after the waters had receded from off the face of this land it became a choice land above all other lands, a chosen land of the Lord; wherefore the Lord would have that all men should serve him who dwell upon the face thereof. [Ether 13:2]*

Nephi continued to speak of the next part of the Lord’s strange act.

*And it came to pass that I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters. [1 Nephi 13:13]*

The Lord, through his Spirit, moved on men and women—they desired to have his word, they desired to be free to worship according to

the dictates of their conscience. The Lord moved on wise men to bring his word to England in the 1500s. William Tyndale, a scholar and a Cambridge and Oxford-trained man said:

*If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of the scripture than thou dost. [James Frederic Mozley, William Tyndale (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1937), p. 34]*

William Tyndale went to the European continent and, of necessity, in secret, began his translation of the Bible into English. When he had completed two-thirds of it, he was betrayed by a supposedly trusted friend, and before he could complete the translation he was burned at the stake. As his last words, uttered just before he expired, he prayed, “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes” (*William Tyndale*, p. 341).

In the old city of London at Newgate Street and Smithfield Square, there is a plaque on the wall that reads: “A few feet from here John Rogers was burned at the stake, February 4, 1555.”

Three hundred others were also burned at the stake for their part in bringing the Bible into England. John Rogers is a direct line ancestor of mine. The scriptures have greater value and more meaning to me because of the price he and others paid to make them available.

He was a Cambridge and Oxford man, and was trained in several languages. He was a friend of William Tyndale, and when Tyndale was burned at the stake, he finished the translation of the Bible and published it in 1537 under the name of Thomas Matthews. He brought 5,000 copies of the Thomas Matthews Bible back to England. He preached at St. Paul’s Church. Because of the opposition and the fact he was immovable in his defense of the Holy Bible, he was taken to Smithfield Square as a public example and on February 4, 1555, was burned at the stake. His wife and his

eleven children, the youngest a babe in arms, journeyed there on the day of the burning, but so hard were the hearts of those doing this sad deed, they were not allowed to speak to him or bid him a last farewell.

In 1611, King James of England—in answer to William Tyndale’s prayer, “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes”—appointed seventy scholars from Cambridge and Oxford to prepare what we now know as the King James Version of the Bible.

Nephi spoke of these ancestors. We see the results of the holy word and the Spirit of the Lord upon them.

*And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity did humble themselves before the Lord; and the power of the Lord was with them. . . .*

*And I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations.*

[1 Nephi 13:16, 19; emphasis added]

Only through the power of God could this have happened. These few colonies were arrayed against a nation whose commonwealth was so extensive, it is said the sun never set upon it. Also, it had the largest and strongest fleet in the world. I repeat Nephi’s words: They “were delivered by the power of God.”

### **The Price They Paid**

I have also stood at Little Boston in England, from where the Pilgrims put out in the Mayflower, a small sailing vessel. I have seen the cells where they were incarcerated, and as I stood there my heart was touched as I thought of the price they paid and the part they played in the Lord’s strange act.

Is it any wonder then why areas like Valley Forge, where General George Washington and his ragged, often hungry and ill-clad men paid such a price that we could live in a free land, have such a sacred feeling, almost as Moses

must have felt when he turned aside to see the burning bush and heard these words: “Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5).

Other such places are in Philadelphia where stands the Liberty Bell and also Constitution Hall, where men, raised up by the Lord himself, brought forth an instrument that places the power of the government in the hands of the people.

Brigham Young said this regarding the Founding Fathers:

*We consider that the men in the Revolution were inspired by the Almighty, to throw off the shackles of the mother government, with her established religion. . . . In thus establishing a new government upon a principle of greater freedom, a basis of self-government allowing the free exercise of religious worship. [DBY, pp. 359–60]*

With the land available and a government established with a constitution allowing freedom of worship and religion, it was then time for the next part of the Lord’s strange act to begin.

He did not go to the learned and famous men of the day to set up his kingdom. As he had done on other occasions, he sent a baby boy—this time to the home of Joseph Smith, Sr., and Lucy Mack. The baby boy grew up almost entirely unschooled by man, but heavenly beings and the Lord himself taught him and guided him through the thirty-eight short years of his life.

He translated a volume of scripture inscribed on golden plates—a record of the Lord’s dealings with the former inhabitants of this American continent—that will ultimately revolutionize religious worship throughout the earth. Through Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery the Lord restored the holy priesthood with its keys of authority to act in his name. He directed Joseph and Oliver to organize his

Church with its saving and exalting ordinances and the priesthood power, which gives the authority to confer the Holy Ghost upon men. This gospel, if received and the power used, will transform hearts and lift men to a higher way of life—both here and hereafter.

From the moment Joseph Smith went to the Sacred Grove to pray, until he died as a martyr, the power of Lucifer in many forms raged after him to destroy this work the Lord had established as a vital part of his strange act. Joseph was driven and abused, he was tarred and feathered, he was hounded and beaten, and he was arrested forty-eight times on false charges in fourteen short years. He and his people were driven from state to state and, finally, after he had completed his part in the Lord's strange act, he went to Carthage in answer to a summons on a false charge.

The governor of the state of Illinois, Thomas B. Ford, promised Joseph protection if he would place himself in the hands of the law at Carthage. The governor failed in his promise of protection, and at the hands of a mob Joseph and Hyrum died as martyrs. Following Joseph's death, Governor Ford said, "Thus fell Joe Smith, the most successful imposter in modern times" (HC 7:35).

Governor Ford evidently did not understand whose work this was, nor did he know about the Lord's strange act, for through his prophet the Lord had stated:

*No unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done. [HC 4:540]*

Following Joseph's death, the Saints were driven from their homes to become exiles—

almost refugees—stripped of almost all they had. But under the leadership of the Lord, and with the testimonies of the Spirit burning deep in their hearts, they crossed the almost trackless plains to a desert place no one else would have—there to do their part in the Lord's strange act, to set up a kingdom where the principles of his gospel could have place in the lives of men and women until his Church could become strong enough to do its part in his strange act.

In about 1980 the prophet of the Lord stated, "We are now strong enough to move forth in the world in a major way." It took 100 years to get the first 100 stakes in the Church. In 1930 there were 104 stakes. In the year 1974, when Spencer W. Kimball became the prophet, there were 630 stakes. Eleven short years later, as his time of leadership closed, there were 1,570 stakes of Zion, or an increase of 940 stakes in just eleven short years.

### **A Mighty Change in the Earth**

The strange act of the Lord is continuing to move forth. It has been interesting to me to note that from 1805, the year Joseph Smith was born, and the next few years, as the priesthood power again came to man and the light of the gospel broke forth on the people of the earth, many of the great inventions came forth: the reaper, the cotton gin, the sewing machine, the steam engine. And even until today the multitude of new inventions have brought a mighty change in the earth: the telephone; radio; television; the computer; the marvel of space travel that is just in its infancy, together with the marvelous power released with man's efforts in the world of the atom; the exciting future of the laser light world, as well as the great advances in the fields of medicine with the vaccines and miracle drugs that have wiped out many of the dread diseases of the past, which, as plagues, swept many from the earth; the transplanting of hearts and kidneys, even artificial organs; and surely the end is not yet. The greatest

books have yet to be written; the greatest inventions have yet to be made.

In the explosion of knowledge and learning that has come to the earth, we live in a day of scientific and intellectual giants, but we also live in a day of spiritual pygmies. God has largely been forgotten except in name only. The Sabbath, his holy day, has become a pleasure-seeking holiday. As much as man has learned and as wonderful as his accomplishments are, yet spiritually most of our Father's children live in the darkest darkness. The sacred power to initiate new life, which God alone controls and of which he is very jealous, has been prostituted on almost every hand; even life itself is destroyed to hide sins. We live in a world void of peace—men cry peace, yet there is no peace. We live in a time of terror and evil and violence where life is of little value. The souls of men hunger and are not satisfied, and they run to and fro but still cannot find God.

#### **Doing Our Part in the Lord's Strange Act**

How privileged we are to come forth at this time, to do *our* part in the Lord's strange act. What a privilege that he should place such trust in us to be an ensign, a spiritual light to all men and women—to play our part in the Lord's strange act so that people, the Lord's children in this entire earth, might see the fruits that come from obedience to his gospel plan.

Now is our time. We are to be a light to the world—an ensign. We might say we are to be a living, breathing visual aid, a product of the gospel of Jesus Christ for all men to see.

*For, behold, I say unto you that Zion shall flourish, and the glory of the Lord shall be upon her;*

*And she shall be an ensign unto the people, and there shall come unto her out of every nation under heaven.* [D&C 64:41–42]

The Lord has commanded us through his prophets, "Verily I say unto you all: Arise and

shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations" (D&C 115:5).

Each one of us has a light. We cannot endure on borrowed light. A person must have the light within himself. The Lord has said in our day:

*And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things.* [D&C 88:67]

This great opportunity to play a leading role in the Lord's strange act is open to each one of us. The brightness of our light depends on our thoughts, on our words, on our deeds, and on the amount of the Spirit we have. Shakespeare gave us this insight: "To thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man" (*Hamlet*, act 1, sc. 3, lines 78–80).

Our new prophet has said:

*Therefore, the only measure of true greatness is how close a man can become like Jesus. That man is greatest who is most like Christ, and those who love him most will be most like him.* [Ezra Taft Benson, "Listen to a Prophet's Voice," *Ensign*, January 1973, p. 57]

In my humble opinion, this generation of young people—the youth of this day—are, as a whole, the finest group yet sent to earth. I am aware you are much stronger, taller, better looking, and keener than the generation I came in. Your part in the Lord's strange act is to be a visual aid, a living, breathing visual aid—available for the world to see how fine the products of his gospel are—literally beginning to fulfill Isaiah's ancient prophecy.

*And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the*

*house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.* [Isaiah 2:3]

### **The Lord's Strange Act Will Not Fail**

We live in a day when nothing can be hid—a day about which the scriptures mention speaking from the housetops. Luke knew and prophesied of this day:

*For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.*

*. . . and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon, the housetops.* [Luke 12:2–3]

We have experienced some of this already. BYU has had a prominent part in it. Sharlene Wells, BYU student, Miss America: the word, the picture, the story of this choice young woman were surely spoken from the housetops. And there is BYU's football team; millions not only heard, but saw. There was extensive coverage in the area I serve in—North America Northeast with its 140 million people—including full pages of newspaper coverage, articles in magazines with large circulation, and radio and TV broadcasting to millions. Today the BYU Center in Jerusalem has received extensive coverage—written, spoken, visual—almost worldwide on a daily and continuing basis.

On the other hand, the negative and part-truth messages have access to the same sophisticated media. They too are spoken from the housetops. The film *The God Makers* makes light of sacred things. The ancient letters and the bombings in Salt Lake City have created doubt and heartache in many lives.

What trust and what confidence the Lord has had in us to allow us to come at this crucial time in his strange act to play our part of being a light to the world. I am proud of you and thousands of other wonderful young men and women across the earth whom I call the "First

Team." The Lord's strange act will not fail. The prophet Daniel gave this assurance:

*And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, . . . and it shall stand for ever.* [Daniel 2:44]

The strange act will not fail, but some individuals may fall short and be darkened and have their light extinguished by the world. Today I challenge you to commit, or recommit, yourself to excellence, both temporal and spiritual. Live so your light will be one of great brilliance, that you may light the way of multitudes who will find God through your example.

The fuel for this light is the Holy Spirit—the Holy Ghost, the thing that makes this Church different from any other church. The thing that makes us, as members, different from other children of the Lord is that we have, or can have, this great power of the Holy Ghost in our lives. The people who do have the Holy Ghost operating in their lives are different. The spirit that radiates from their persons is different. There is even a glow in their faces—the flesh in their countenances seems lighted—the gray, dull look is not there. The Holy Ghost will not dwell in an unclean, disobedient tabernacle. The Holy Ghost comes as a gift from God when we comply with the conditions established for his companionship.

Thus cleansed and committed, this heavenly power can have place in us. It fuels the light we are asked to hold up. The Savior said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Intention to hold up our light is good, but it is not enough; we must really hold it up. We must actually obey and meet all requirements if our light is to be seen—if we do our part in the Lord's strange act. Some might think they can fool their leaders. Some might think they

can fool their bishop or their stake president. Some might even fool themselves, but you cannot fool the Spirit. The Spirit is the oil that fuels the light we are to hold up.

I witness to you that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, our Savior and our Redeemer. We live in a day when nothing can be hid. The word, the account of our every act, will be spoken from the rooftops sooner or later.

In the great plan—the Lord’s strange act—the Lord Jesus Christ did not fail. Gutenberg did not fail in his part. Columbus and the Pilgrims did not fail in their parts. The Founding Fathers did not fail. Joseph Smith and the pioneers did not fail. This generation will not fail. There will be some who are too weak and so careless their lights will go out. But may we be true to our sacred commitments made to the Lord—some before this life here—to faithfully do our part in his strange act that we might be an ensign to all, that our light might be one of great brilliance. I dare you to rise up to new levels of obedience, to rise up to

new levels of spirituality. Remember the Lord’s promise:

*Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*  
[D&C 88:63]

*I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.*  
[D&C 82:10]

*Give me some men who are Stouthearted Men who will fight for the right they adore.  
Start me with ten who are Stouthearted Men and I’ll soon give you ten thousand more.*  
[Words by Oscar Hammerstein II,  
“Stouthearted Men,” from *The New Moon*]

Remember, the creation of a thousand forests can come from one acorn.

To each one of you I say thanks for being great. We are proud of you. We are counting on you. I say this in the holy name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.