

# Missionary Experiences

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I'm very happy to greet all of you wonderful students here this morning and your leaders, and I understand that you have a group of missionaries here, as you did a year ago when I spoke at a devotional; so being a missionary, I decided, when I was trying to decide what to speak about this morning, to tell you some of my mission experiences. I think that you'll get more out of that than if I tried to discuss any particular subject or principle of the gospel. If you don't think I could, read the books I've written, and you'll know that I could.

First, I started way back in 1905 when I went on my first mission to Holland. My cousin and I rode together until we reached Liverpool, then he was sent up into Norway, the Land of the Midnight Sun, and I was sent into Holland. After we had been in the mission field a few months, I received a letter from him calling me by name, and he said, "I met a man the other day who knows more about religion than I've ever dreamed of knowing, and I told him if he had something better than I had, I'd join his church."

So I wrote him back and called him by name, and I said, "If he has something better than you have, you *ought* to join his church, but does he have something better than a personal visitation to this earth after centuries of dark-

ness by God the Eternal Father and his Son Jesus Christ to usher in the dispensation of the fullness of times and to reveal the real personalities of God and his Son Jesus Christ? Does he have something better than the coming of Moroni with the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, which gives us the history of God's dealings with his prophets in this land of America over a period of a thousand years? Does he have something better than the coming back to this earth of John the Baptist, who was beheaded for his testimony of Jesus, to restore the Aaronic Priesthood, the power to baptize by immersion for the remission of sins? Does he have something better than the coming of Peter, James, and John, who were upon the Mount of Transfiguration with the Savior and returned to this earth to restore the holy priesthood, the power of the apostleship, the power to organize the church and kingdom of God upon the earth? Does he have something better than the coming of Moses

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with the keys of the gathering of latter-day Israel? Does he have something better than the coming of Elijah the prophet, of whose coming Malachi testified that before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, the Lord would send Elijah the prophet to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest he come and smite the whole earth with a curse? Now that's an important mission." I said, "If he has something better than that, you ought to join his church."

I tell the missionaries that, if you learn how to tell our story, you never need to argue with anybody. You tell them things they've never heard of, and you prove them out of the Lord's holy scriptures.

When I was president of the Southern States Mission, I preached a sermon down in Quitman, Georgia, on the eternal duration of the marriage covenant and the family unit. I quoted from Rulon Howell's book *Do Men Believe What Their Churches Prescribe?* Along one side he has the names of all the important subjects and across the top the names of various large churches of the world. I read from that book. Not one of the major churches believed in the eternal duration of the marriage covenant and the family unit. As the meeting closed, I stood at the door shaking hands with the people who were there. A man came up and introduced himself as a Baptist minister, and I said, "Did I misquote you here tonight?"

"No, Mr. Richards," he said. "It's like you say; we don't all believe all the things that our churches teach."

I said, "You don't believe them either. Why don't you go back and teach your people the truth. They'll take it from you, and they're not ready to take it from the Mormon elders yet."

He said, "I'll see you again."

I didn't see him for about four months until I went back to that branch. My coming was announced in the newspaper, and as I walked to that little church, there stood that

Baptist minister. As we shook hands, I said, "I'd certainly be interested to know what you thought of my talk the last time I was here."

He said, "Mr. Richards, I've been thinking about it ever since. I believe every word you said, only I'd like to have heard the rest of it." Now you know we never get talked out when we get talking about the principles of the gospel. There was a man occupying a pulpit in the Baptist Church who believed every word I'd said, and yet he couldn't preach it to his people.

In the Book of Mormon we read about when Lehi was in the desert. He told his son Joseph that the Lord had promised Joseph who was sold into Egypt that in the latter days he would raise up a prophet from his loins whose name would be Joseph and whose father's name would be Joseph. (Now obviously that was Joseph Smith.) The Lord said about him:

[That prophet shall] *bring forth my word.*

[2 Nephi 3:11]

The Prophet Joseph brought us the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and many other writings. He has given us more revealed truth than any other prophet who has ever lived upon the face of the earth as far as our records are concerned. That was written in the Book of Mormon before this Church was ever organized.

Then he said,

*Not to the bringing forth my word only . . . but to the convincing them of my word, which shall have already gone forth among them.* [2 Nephi 3:11]

What did he mean by that? That in this world, where there are hundreds of different churches preaching men's interpretation of the scriptures, the Lord would give this new prophet an understanding of the scriptures to reveal them in the spirit in which they were written. Then he said:

*For the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation. [2 Nephi 3:15]*

Why? Because this prophet would be clothed upon by the holy priesthood, the power to administer the saving ordinances of the gospel.

Then the Lord adds:

*And I will make him great in mine eyes; for he shall do my work. [2 Nephi 3:8]*

Whatever the world may think of this prophet of this dispensation, there's the testimony of the Lord that he shall be great in his eyes.

Now, referring to the statement about "convincing them of my word which shall have already gone forth among them," I want to tell you of a little experience I had when I was in Holland. I had an invitation from some businessmen to attend one of their Bible classes. They met every week in one of the homes. We met that week in the home of a prominent furniture dealer. There were about 20 men there, and the only woman was the daughter of the man of the house. They gave me an hour and a half to discuss universal salvation, which includes our doctrine of preaching the gospel in the eternal worlds to the spirits that were disobedient here upon the earth and the doctrine of baptism of the living for the dead. So after I had discussed that matter, I just gave them chapter and verse and let them read it in their own copies of the Bible. I figured that they would believe it more if they read it in their Bible; otherwise, they would think that I had a different Bible. When I was through, I laid my Bible on the table and folded my arms and waited for a comment.

The first comment came from the daughter of the man of the house. She said, "Father, I just can't understand it. I have never attended one of these Bible classes in my life when you haven't had the last word to say on everything, and tonight you haven't said a word."

He shook his head and said, "My daughter, there isn't anything to say. This man has been teaching us things we have never heard of, and he's been teaching them to us out of our own Bible." That's what the Lord meant when he said that the prophet of this dispensation would not only bring forth his words, but would convince people of his words that had already gone forth among them.

Along that line, some years ago the congregational and evangelical churches of these western states—California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada—were holding a conference of their leaders and ministers in Salt Lake. The leader of the group wrote a letter to President McKay and asked him if he would send one of the General Authorities of the Church to attend the morning session of their conference and tell them the story of Mormonism, to be their guest for lunch, and to remain for an hour and a half in the afternoon and let them ask questions. I got the assignment, and I don't mind telling you that I was happy to get it. I tell the missionaries you'll never need to argue with anybody if you learn how to tell our story and you keep the lead. So when I arrived I said, "Do you want it just the way we got our Church and what we believe?"

The man in charge said, "That's just what we want."

Some of them wanted to get away on earlier planes to the Northwest, so they set the luncheon back half an hour so that they could give me two and a half hours in that morning meeting. I presented our message to them just about the same way that I have presented it in *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, which many of you have read, showing what we got by revelation rather than by reformation. The churches of this world have not been able to agree because they have not understood the scriptures as they have tried to interpret them; and no two of them can agree, so that has brought into the world many churches. But we have a

gospel that has come directly from heaven. When I wrote *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, I predicated it on the thought that we are the only Christian church in the world that didn't get our religion out of the Bible; we got it by revelation from heaven; then we use the Bible to prove that what we have is what we should have.

After I had presented what we got by revelation (and I've already referred to a little of that when I told you about my cousin who was in Norway), I said, "While I was the presiding bishop of the Church, we directed the building program of the Church. We had the plans prepared for the Los Angeles Temple. One day we showed those plans to the First Presidency. We had 84 pages about 4 feet long and 2 ½ feet wide. We didn't have the electric plans or the plumbing plans complete, and yet there was that temple built spiritually, and there was not a hole in the ground. You could take those plans and go all over the world and try to fit them to every building in the world, but there's only one building they would fit, and that's the Mormon temple in Los Angeles. Of course, you could find buildings that have material in them like the material in that temple, such as lumber, cement, tiling, electrical wiring, and plumbing, but you can't find any other building in the world that those plans will fit except the Mormon temple in Los Angeles."

Then I held up the Bible and said, "Here's the Lord's blueprint. Isaiah said the Lord had declared the end from the beginning. It's all here when you know how to understand it. Isaiah said,

*The grass withereth, and the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever.* [40:8]

You could take this, the Lord's blueprint, and try to fit it to every church in this world, but there's only one church that it will fit, and that's The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Of course, you can find other churches

that have some of the same things in them like are in this blueprint, but you can't find any other church that this, the Lord's blueprint, will fit."

Then I said, "Now, I'll proceed to illustrate to you what I mean. In Farrar's *Life of Christ*, he said there were two passages in the New Testament for which he could find no excuse. The first was John 10:16, where Jesus said,

*Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*

I said, "Do any of you men know why that is in the Bible?"

No answer.

"Do any of you know any church in the world that does know why it's in the Bible?"

No answer.

"Well, we know all about it." Then I tied it to what I'd told them about the promise of Moses to Joseph who was sold into Egypt of a new land separated from his brethren in the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills, and, describing that land, Moses used the word *precious* five times in just four little verses (see Deuteronomy 33:13–16).

"Do any of you know where the land of Joseph is?"

No answer.

"Do any of you know where any church in the world that does know where it is?"

No answer.

"Well, we know all about it," I said. "It's the land of America." And then I led up to where the Lord commanded Ezekiel that the two records should be kept, one of Judah and his followers, the house of Israel, and one of Joseph and his followers, the house of Israel, and in the days of their children—that is in the latter days—when they would say,

*Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these?*

*Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. [Ezekiel 37:18–19]*

“Do any of you,” I said, “know where that stick or record of Joseph is that the Lord commanded should be written?”

No answer.

“Well, we know all about it; it’s the Book of Mormon. And when you get the Book of Mormon, you read about when Jesus visited his people here in the land of America, when he told them that they were the other sheep of whom he spoke to his disciples in Jerusalem. He said never at any time had the Lord commanded him to tell his disciples who the other sheep were, only that he had other sheep that were not of that fold.” See how beautifully the scriptures fit together when you understand them?

The second passage that Canon Farrar couldn’t understand is 1 Corinthians 15:29, where Paul said:

*Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?*

I said, “Do any of you know why that is in the Bible?”

No answer.

“Do any of you know of any church in the world that does know why that’s in the Bible?”

No answer.

“Well, we know all about it.” Then I told them that Peter said that Jesus was

*put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:*

*By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;*

*Which sometime were disobedient . . . in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. [1 Peter 3:18–20]*

“Now,” I said, “obviously if Jesus preached to them, his gospel was faith, repentance, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. And since you can’t baptize a spirit in water, the Lord had to give them a vicarious baptism of the living for the dead so that holy and sacred ordinance could be performed for them.” I went on to point out that Peter said,

*For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. [1 Peter 4:6]*

That helps you to understand what Jesus meant when he said:

*The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. [John 5:25]*

The world has interpreted that to mean those who are dead in sin, but Jesus amplified it by saying:

*Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the grave shall hear his voice. [John 5:28]*

See how beautifully that fits together?

Then I gave those men some more passages concerning the kingdom that God was to set up in the latter days and the heavens that were to receive the Christ until the restitution of all things spoken by the mouths of all the holy prophets since the world began and then the angel that was to bring the gospel in the latter days to be preached to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; and in each one I would



say, “Do you know why these passages are in the scripture as part of the Lord’s blueprint? Do you know any church in the world that claims that these things have been fulfilled?” Do you see how beautifully the gospel and all these beautiful fulfillments of the words of the holy prophets fit together?

Toward the close of my remarks, the man in charge said, “Now, Mr. Richards, we’ve heard it said that you believe God has a wife. Would you explain that to us?” I think he thought he had me over a barrel or in a corner that I couldn’t get out of.

Rather facetiously I said, “Well, I don’t see how in the world God could have a son without a wife, do you?” They all began to twitter, and I didn’t have any trouble with that question.

Those ministers and church leaders wanted to have an hour and a half to ask questions, and after they had listened to me for two and a half hours, I got that one question from them, and that was the only one. The man in charge said when I left them, “Mr. Richards, this has been one of the most interesting experiences of my entire life.” No wonder Isaiah said it would be a marvelous work and a wonder. That’s what it is to me, and that’s what every missionary ought to make it be to those who are yet in darkness.

Now, I’ll tell you a little experience. I had a debate with a minister in Amsterdam when I was on my first mission. One of the Saints invited me to come to her home. She wanted to invite her neighbor in and let me preach the gospel to her. When my companion and I went to that home, the neighbor was there, but she brought her minister with her. Well, we had a little difference of opinion on the discussion of the priesthood, and right there he challenged me for a debate in his church. I was young and had a lot of umph in me, and I accepted the challenge. We were not advised in those days not to debate.

When we arrived in his church on Saturday night according to our appointment, that

church was full. All of his people were there, and all of our people were there. I didn’t know how our people found it out; I didn’t tell them. He stood up and said, “Now inasmuch as Mr. Richards is a guest in our church, we’ll accord him the privilege of opening the debate. We’ll each talk for twenty minutes and continue as long as it is mutually agreeable. Is that satisfactory to you, Mr. Richards?”

I said, “Very much so.” I didn’t tell him, but I would have given him the shirt off my back for the privilege of opening that debate, and he just handed it to me on a silver platter. I didn’t know whether the Lord had anything to do with that or not, but I always thought he did.

I stood up and said, “The last time I talked to my friend here, we had a difference of opinion on the principle of priesthood. I’ve come here tonight prepared to discuss that subject, but I don’t propose to start at that point. If you were going to build a house, you wouldn’t try to put the roof on it until you got the foundation in because if a foundation were faulty, it wouldn’t do you any good to put the roof on because the house would fall. I propose to open this debate by laying the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I choose for my text the sixth chapter of Hebrews where Paul said:

*Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. [Hebrews 6:1–2]*

I hurried over faith and repentance because I thought they believed them. I spiked down baptism by immersion for the remission of sins until everybody in the audience was giving me approval. Then I came to the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. They didn’t believe that. They thought the Holy Ghost came just like the breezes that blow over your

head. You remember when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God through the preaching of Philip. They sent Peter and John to them, and when they came, they prayed for those men. They laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon the sorcerer saw that the Holy Ghost was conveyed by the laying on of the apostle's hands, he offered them money, saying:

*Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.*

*But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou has thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. [Acts 8:19–20]*

Then I gave another reference or two about the laying on of hands out of the Bible and sat down. "My friend" stood up. He never mentioned a word I'd said. He started on the Mountain Meadows Massacre and the Golden Bible and the fact that Joseph Smith admitted that he'd made many mistakes, and then he turned to me and said, "Now if Mr. Richards will explain these matters, this audience will be most appreciative."

I was on my feet just like that. (My companion said, "How did you think so fast?" and I said, "What have you been praying for all week?") I stood on my feet and said, "In the days of the Savior, his enemies tried to trick him with cunningness and craftiness. I don't suppose there is anybody here today that would like to see us resort to those old tactics.

This friend of mine offered me the courtesy of opening this debate as a guest in his church, and now he wants to steal from me the very courtesy that he extended me, and I don't propose to let him do it. So, my friend, you may have your twenty minutes over again."

He couldn't do it, and he knew he couldn't. His wife stood up in the audience and said, "What Mr. Richards is asking is fair; you ought to answer him." Even then he couldn't do it.

I said to my companion, "Stand up and give me my coat and hat." It was wintertime. I said, "I am willing to remain here till 10 o'clock tomorrow morning, when I have to be in my own church, provided this debate can go forward on the basis that you set up, but if not, I'm going to leave and ask my companion to leave and ask our Saints to leave, and we'll leave it to you to settle with your people what's happened here tonight." He still couldn't do it, so we all walked out on him. I met him on the street time and time again after that, and he always ducked his head so he wouldn't have to speak to me.

Now, brothers and sisters, as you've listened to me this morning, I think you can understand why I tell our missionaries you never need to argue with anybody if you learn the sweetest story that has been told in this world since the resurrection of the Christ. It is true, and that is my testimony to you. I pray God to help you to do your part to share it with those who are yet in darkness, and I leave you my love and blessings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.