

Chapter 43: "He Was a Prophet of God": Contemporaries of Joseph Smith Testify of His Prophetic Mission, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, (2007), 493–506

"I feel like shouting, hallelujah, all the time, when I think that I ever knew Joseph Smith, the Prophet." (Brigham Young)

From the Life of Joseph Smith

In Nauvoo, the Saints often gathered together to hear the Prophet Joseph Smith speak to them. Because there was no building in Nauvoo large enough to hold all the Saints, the Prophet often spoke outside. He frequently spoke in a grove located just west of the temple, where thousands could assemble. (JS Manual pg493)

Amasa Potter recalled being present at a powerful sermon the Prophet Joseph Smith preached to a large group of Saints in Nauvoo:

"When [the Prophet] had spoken about thirty minutes there came up a heavy wind and storm. The dust was so dense that we could not see each other any distance, and some of the people were leaving when Joseph called out to them to stop and let their prayers ascend to Almighty God that the winds may cease blowing and the rain stop falling, and it should be so. In a very few minutes the winds and rain ceased and the elements became calm as a summer's morning. The storm divided and went on the north and south of the city, and we could see in the distance the trees and shrubs waving in the wind, while where we were it was quiet for one hour, and during that time one of the greatest sermons that ever fell from the Prophet's lips was preached on the great subject of the dead."⁵

The Saints who heard the Prophet Joseph Smith speak bore powerful and vivid testimonies of his prophetic mission. Many of them recorded their memories of discourses they heard him give and experiences they had with him, for they wanted the generations that followed them to know, as they knew, that Joseph Smith was truly a prophet of God. (JS manual pg 494)

THE TRIAL OF JOSEPH SMITH THE PROPHET

Let me explain what we are going to do today. I am pretending that you are an informal court in which Joseph Smith is on trial – or should I say still on trial? For there are many still who question his call to be a prophet of God.

We will pretend together that I am counsel of the defense, calling witnesses to prove once and for all that he was called of God, and is a true prophet of God. Now stretch your imagination if you will as each witness is called forth, seeing them as the person called to testify.

My first statement of truth I wish to present to the court is this:

"Like the early Saints, we can know that Joseph Smith is the prophet through whom the Lord restored the fulness of the gospel." (J.S. manual pg. 495)

I would like to call as my first witness: "Angus M. Cannon, a member who lived in Nauvoo as a youth and later became a stake president in Salt lake City Brother Cannon, If you would be so kind as to share with us your testimony:

Brother Cannon:

"On one occasion especially do I remember Brother Joseph as he addressed an assembly of the Saints, in the spring of 1844. It was under some large oak trees, in a hollow south of the Temple, near to Parley street. He was discoursing upon the fact that God, in establishing His Church, had provided that only one man was authorized, of God, to receive revelations that should be binding upon the Church. ... It was on this same occasion that I heard the Prophet declare he had received the Melchizedek Priesthood, under the administration of Peter, James and John.

"The impression created upon my young mind in the inspired utterances of Joseph Smith has accompanied me throughout my subsequent life; and when darkness would otherwise have beclouded my mind, his testimony has come up vividly before me, giving me evidence that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been established and governed by the manifest power and authority of God."¹⁴ (JS Manual pg 496-497)

Thank you Brother Cannon for your testimony, you may return to your seat.

Will Bethsheba W. Smith please come forward to take the stand, Sister Smith was the general president of the Relief Society from 1901-1910. Sister Smith if you will also share with us your testimony that would be most helpful.

Sister Smith:

"I know him to be what he professed to be—a true prophet of God, and the Lord through him restored the everlasting gospel and every ordinance and endowment that will lead us into the celestial kingdom."⁸ (JS Manual pg 495)

Thank you Sister Smith for your testimony, you may return to your seat.

Now unlike most court proceedings I would like to open this up to you in this courtroom, by asking you these questions, concerning the testimonies you have just heard.

Question 1: "What impresses you about these testimonies?

Question 2: "What is the foundation of your own testimony of Joseph Smith? And how did you obtain this testimony?

Thank you for sharing your testimonies of Joseph Smith as a prophet called of God.

My second statement of truth I wish to present to the court is this:

"Joseph Smith was an example we can follow in developing a Christlike character." (JS Manual pg 497)

I would like to call Jesse N Smith, a cousin of Joseph Smith, as my next witness. Brother Smith if you would please share your testimony with us.

Brother Smith:

[The Prophet was] incomparably the most God-like man I ever saw. ... I know that by nature he was incapable of lying and deceitfulness, possessing the greatest kindness and nobility of character. I felt when in his presence that he could read me through and through. I know he was all that he claimed to be."²¹ (JS Manual pg 499)

Thank you Brother Smith for your testimony you may return to your seat.

If Mary Alice Cannon Lambert would take the stand next to share her testimony with us that would be wonderful. Go ahead Sister Lambert, when you're ready.

Sister Lambert:

"The love the saints had for him was inexpressible. They would willingly have laid down their lives for him. If he was to talk, every task would be laid aside that they might listen to his words. He was not an ordinary man. Saints and sinners alike felt and recognized a power and influence which he carried with him. It was impossible to meet him and not be impressed by the strength of his personality and influence."¹⁹ (JS Manual pg. 498)

Thank you Sister Lambert for your testimony you may now return to your seat.

Again as before I would like to open this up to you in this courtroom; If you would please answer a question concerning these witnesses' statements, that would be most helpful in my case.

Question #1: How did these statements influence your feelings about Joseph Smith?

Thank you for what you have shared, it is most helpful.

My third statement of truth I wish to present to the court is this:

"As the prophet through whom the gospel was restored, Joseph Smith taught God's plan of salvation with clarity and power." (JS Manual pg.499)

I would like to call Howard Coray, a clerk to Joseph Smith, as my next witness Brother Coray if you would please share your testimony with us.

Brother Coray:

"I have studied the Gospel as revealed by Joseph Smith and wondered if it were possible for anyone unaided by the Spirit of God to have revealed such a system of salvation and exaltation for man. My conclusion is in the negative. I sat and listened to his preaching at the stand in Nauvoo a great many times when I have been completely carried away with his indescribable eloquence—power of expression—speaking as I have never heard any other man speak."²⁵ (JS Manual pg 500)

Thank you Brother Coray for your testimony, you may now return to your seat.

If William Clayton would take the stand next to share his testimony with us that would be most helpful. Go ahead Brother Clayton, when you're ready.

Brother Clayton:

"We have had the privilege of conversing with Joseph Smith Jr. and we are delighted with his company. ... He is ... a man of sound judgment and possessed of an abundance of intelligence, and whilst you listen to his conversation you receive intelligence which expands your mind and causes your heart to rejoice. He is very familiar and delights to instruct the poor saint. I can converse with him just as easily as I can with you, and with regard to being willing to communicate instruction he says, 'I receive it freely and I will give it freely.' He is willing to answer any question I have put to him and is pleased when we ask him questions. He seems exceedingly well versed in the scriptures, and whilst conversing upon any subject, such light and beauty is revealed as I never saw before. If I had come from England purposely to converse with him a few days I should have considered myself well paid for my trouble."²⁹ (JS Manual pg 501)

Thank you Brother Clayton for your testimony, you may now return to your seat.

Again let me ask those of you in this courtroom another question.

Question #1: How can these testimonies help us as we study and teach the gospel?

Thank you for sharing.

Now my final statement of truth I wish to present to the court is this:

"Like the early Saints, we can treasure up the words of Joseph Smith and live the principles he taught." (JS Manual pg. 502)

Will Emmeline B Wells be so kind as to come up and share your testimony with us?
Proceed when you are ready Sister Wells.

Sister Wells:

"In the Prophet Joseph Smith, I believed I recognized the great spiritual power that brought joy and comfort to the Saints. ... The power of God rested upon him to such a degree that on many occasions he seemed transfigured. His expression was mild and almost childlike in repose; and when addressing the people, who loved him it seemed to adoration, the glory of his countenance was beyond description. At other times the great power of his manner, more than of his voice (which was sublimely eloquent to me), seemed to shake the place on which we stood and penetrate the inmost soul of his hearers, and I am sure that then they would have laid down their lives to defend him. I always listened spell-bound to his every utterance—the chosen of God in this last dispensation."³¹ (JS Manual pg. 502)

Thank you Sister Wells, you have been most helpful. You may now return to your seat.

And now will Brigham Young, please take the stand and share your testimony with us.
President Young...?

President Young:

"From the first time I saw the Prophet Joseph I never lost a word that came from him concerning the kingdom. And this is the key of knowledge that I have to-day, that I did hearken to the words of Joseph, and treasured them up in my heart, laid them away, asking my Father in the name of his Son Jesus to bring them to my mind when needed. I treasured up the things of God, and this is the key that I hold to-day. I was anxious to learn from Joseph and the Spirit of God."³⁶ (JS Manual pg 503-504)

Thank you President Young for your testimony, you may now return to your seat. And I will take your place to bear my own witness.

(Share testimony)

May it please the court I rest my case I have submitted more than the needed 3 witness' – all that my time would permit. In early Israel Moses established under God, a law of witness, namely. "In the mouth of two or three witness shall every word be established." (Duet. 17:6)

The verdict should be plain: "**JOSEPH SMITH IS A PROPHET OF GOD.**"

May we each write down our own testimonies for our families and future generations just as those we have witnessed today did. May we too allow the truth to be 'written upon our hearts as with an iron pen.' So that we might share our testimonies openly with all those who want to know the truth. Joseph Smith is a true prophet of God. Of this I bear my witness, In the name of Jesus Christ Amen.

This court is now adjourned.

Parts to hand out ahead of lesson (either the week before or day of):

Brother Cannon:

"On one occasion especially do I remember Brother Joseph as he addressed an assembly of the Saints, in the spring of 1844. It was under some large oak trees, in a hollow south of the Temple, near to Parley street. He was discoursing upon the fact that God, in establishing His Church, had provided that only one man was authorized, of God, to receive revelations that should be binding upon the Church. ... It was on this same occasion that I heard the Prophet declare he had received the Melchizedek Priesthood, under the administration of Peter, James and John.

"The impression created upon my young mind in the inspired utterances of Joseph Smith has accompanied me throughout my subsequent life; and when darkness would otherwise have beclouded my mind, his testimony has come up vividly before me, giving me evidence that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been established and governed by the manifest power and authority of God."¹⁴ (JS Manual pg 496-497)

Sister Smith:

"I know him to be what he professed to be—a true prophet of God, and the Lord through him restored the everlasting gospel and every ordinance and endowment that will lead us into the celestial kingdom."⁸ (JS Manual pg 495)

Brother Smith:

[The Prophet was] incomparably the most God-like man I ever saw. ... I know that by nature he was incapable of lying and deceitfulness, possessing the greatest kindness and nobility of character. I felt when in his presence that he could read me through and through. I know he was all that he claimed to be."²¹ (JS Manual pg 499)

Sister Lambert:

"The love the saints had for him was inexpressible. They would willingly have laid down their lives for him. If he was to talk, every task would be laid aside that they might listen to his words. He was not an ordinary man. Saints and sinners alike felt and recognized a power and influence which he carried with him. It was impossible to meet him and not be impressed by the strength of his personality and influence."¹⁹ (JS Manual pg. 498)

Brother Coray:

"I have studied the Gospel as revealed by Joseph Smith and wondered if it were possible for anyone unaided by the Spirit of God to have revealed such a system of salvation and exaltation for man. My conclusion is in the negative. I sat and listened to his preaching at the stand in Nauvoo a great many times when I have been completely carried away with his indescribable eloquence—power of expression—speaking as I have never heard any other man speak."²⁵ (JS Manual pg 500)

Brother Clayton:

"We have had the privilege of conversing with Joseph Smith Jr. and we are delighted with his company. ... He is ... a man of sound judgment and possessed of an abundance of intelligence, and whilst you listen to his conversation you receive intelligence which expands your mind and causes your heart to rejoice. He is very familiar and delights to instruct the poor saint. I can converse with him just as easily as I can with you, and with regard to being willing to communicate instruction he says, 'I receive it freely and I will give it freely.' He is willing to answer any question I have put to him and is pleased when we ask him questions. He seems exceedingly well versed in the scriptures, and whilst conversing upon any subject, such light and beauty is revealed as I never saw before. If I had come from England purposely to converse with him a few days I should have considered myself well paid for my trouble."²⁹ (JS Manual pg 501)

Sister Wells:

"In the Prophet Joseph Smith, I believed I recognized the great spiritual power that brought joy and comfort to the Saints. ... The power of God rested upon him to such a degree that on many occasions he seemed transfigured. His expression was mild and almost childlike in repose; and when addressing the people, who loved him it seemed to adoration, the glory of his countenance was beyond description. At other times the great power of his manner, more than of his voice (which was sublimely eloquent to me), seemed to shake the place on which we stood and penetrate the inmost soul of his hearers, and I am sure that then they would have laid down their lives to defend him. I always listened spell-bound to his every utterance—the chosen of God in this last dispensation."³¹ (JS Manual pg. 502)

President Young:

"From the first time I saw the Prophet Joseph I never lost a word that came from him concerning the kingdom. And this is the key of knowledge that I have to-day, that I did hearken to the words of Joseph, and treasured them up in my heart, laid them away, asking my Father in the name of his Son Jesus to bring them to my mind when needed. I treasured up the things of God, and this is the key that I hold to-day. I was anxious to learn from Joseph and the Spirit of God."³⁶ (JS Manual pg 503-504)