
“Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence”

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Beware the temptation to retreat from a good thing. If it was right when you prayed about it and trusted it and lived for it, it is right now.

Jeffrey R. Holland, “Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2000, 7

There is a lesson in the Prophet Joseph Smith’s account of the First Vision which virtually every Latter-day Saint has had occasion to experience, or one day soon will. It is the plain and very sobering truth that before great moments, certainly before great spiritual moments, there can come adversity, opposition, and darkness. Life has some of those moments for us, and occasionally they come just as we are approaching an important decision or a significant step in our lives.

In that marvelous account which we read too seldom, Joseph said he had scarcely begun his prayer when he felt a power of astonishing influence come over him. “Thick darkness,” as he described it, gathered around him and seemed bent on his utter destruction. But he exerted all his powers to call upon God to deliver him out of the power of this enemy, and as he did so a pillar of light brighter than the noonday sun descended gradually until it rested upon him. At the very moment of the light’s appearance, he found himself delivered from the destructive power which had held him bound. What then followed is the greatest epiphany since the events surrounding the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ in the meridian of time. The Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith, and the dispensation of the fulness of times had begun. 1

Most of us do not need any more reminders than we have already had that there is one who personifies “opposition in all things,” that “an angel of God” fell “from heaven” and in so doing became “miserable forever.” What a chilling destiny! Because this is Lucifer’s fate, “he sought also the misery of all mankind,” Lehi teaches us. 2

The Fight Goes On

An entire article could be devoted to this subject of the adversary’s strong, preliminary, anticipatory opposition to many of the good things God has in store for us. But I want to move past that observation to another truth we may not recognize so readily. This is a lesson in the parlance of the athletic contest that reminds us “it isn’t over until it’s over.” It is the reminder that the fight goes on. Unfortunately we must not think Satan is defeated with that first strong breakthrough which so dramatically brought the light and moved us forward.

To make my point a little more vividly, may I go to another passage of scripture, indeed, to another vision. You will recall that the book of Moses begins with him being taken up to “an exceedingly high mountain” where, the scripture says, “he saw God face to face, and he talked

with him, and the glory of God was upon Moses.” What then followed was what happens to prophets who are taken to high mountains. The Lord said to Moses:

“Look, and I will show thee the workmanship of mine hands. ... Moses looked, and ... beheld the earth, yea, even all of it; and there was not a particle of it which he did not behold, discerning it by the spirit of God. And he beheld also the inhabitants thereof, and there was not a soul which he beheld not.”³

This experience is remarkable by every standard. It is one of the great revelations given in human history. It stands with the greatest accounts we have of any prophet’s experience with Divinity.

But Moses’ message to you today is: Don’t let your guard down. Don’t assume that a great revelation, some marvelous, illuminating moment, the opening of an inspired path, is the end of it. Remember, it isn’t over until it’s over.

What happens to Moses next, *after* his revelatory moment, would be ludicrous if it were not so dangerous and so true to form. Lucifer—in an effort to continue his opposition, in his unflinching effort to get his licks in later if not sooner—appears and shouts in equal portions of anger and petulance after God has revealed Himself to the prophet: “Moses, worship me.” But Moses is not having it. He has just seen the real thing, and by comparison this sort of performance is pretty dismal.

“Moses looked upon Satan and said: Who art thou? ... Where is thy glory, that I should worship thee?”

“For behold, I could not look upon God, except his glory should come upon me. ... But I can look upon thee in the natural man. ...

“Where is thy glory, for it is darkness unto me? And I can judge between thee and God. ...

“Get thee hence, Satan; deceive me not.”

The record then depicts a reaction that is both pathetic and frightening:

“And now, when Moses had said these words, Satan cried with a loud voice, and ranted upon the earth, and commanded, saying: I am the Only Begotten, worship me.

“And it came to pass that Moses began to fear exceedingly; and as he began to fear, he saw the bitterness of hell. Nevertheless, calling upon God [the very phrase used by Joseph Smith], he received strength, and he commanded, saying: Depart from me, Satan, for this one God only will I worship, which is the God of glory.

“And now Satan began to tremble, and the earth shook. ...

“And it came to pass that Satan cried with a loud voice, with weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth; and he departed hence,” 4 always to come again, we can be sure, but always to be defeated by the God of glory—always.

Do Not Draw Back

I wish to encourage every one of us regarding the opposition that so often comes after enlightened decisions have been made, after moments of revelation and conviction have given us a peace and an assurance we thought we would never lose. In his letter to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul was trying to encourage new members who had just joined the Church, who undoubtedly had had spiritual experiences and received the pure light of testimony, only to discover that their troubles had not ended but that some of them had just begun.

Paul pleaded with those new members in much the same way President Gordon B. Hinckley is pleading with new members today. The reminder is that we cannot sign on for a battle of such eternal significance and everlasting consequence without knowing it will be a fight—a good fight and a winning fight, but a fight nevertheless. Paul says to those who thought a new testimony, a personal conversion, a spiritual baptismal experience would put them beyond trouble—to these he says, “Call to remembrance the former days, in which, *after ye were illuminated*, ye endured a great fight of afflictions.” Then this tremendous counsel, which is at the heart of my counsel to you: “*Cast not away therefore your confidence*, which hath great recompence of reward.

“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. ...

“... If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

“... We are not of them who draw back unto perdition.” 5

In Latter-day Saint talk that is to say, Sure it is tough—before you join the Church, while you are trying to join, and after you have joined. That is the way it has always been, Paul says, but don’t draw back. Don’t panic and retreat. Don’t lose your confidence. Don’t forget how you once felt. Don’t distrust the experience you had. That tenacity is what saved Moses and Joseph Smith when the adversary confronted them, and it is what will save you.

I suppose every returned missionary and probably every convert reading these words knows exactly what I am talking about. Appointments for discussions canceled, the Book of Mormon in a plastic bag hanging from a front doorknob, baptismal dates not met. And so it goes through the teaching period, through the commitments and the baptism, through the first weeks and months in the Church, and more or less forever—at least, the adversary would pursue it forever if he thought he could see any weakening of your resolve, any chink in your armor.

This opposition turns up almost any place something good has happened. It can happen when you are trying to get an education. It can hit you after your first month in your new mission field.

It certainly happens in matters of love and marriage. It can occur in situations related to your family, Church callings, or career.

With any major decision there are cautions and considerations to make, but once there has been illumination, beware the temptation to retreat from a good thing. If it was right when you prayed about it and trusted it and lived for it, it is right now. Don't give up when the pressure mounts. Certainly don't give in to that being who is bent on the destruction of your happiness. Face your doubts. Master your fears. "Cast not away therefore your confidence." Stay the course and see the beauty of life unfold for you.

The Spirit of Revelation

To help us make our way through these experiences, these important junctures in our lives, let me draw from another scriptural reference to Moses. It was given in the early days of this dispensation when revelation was needed, when a true course was being set and had to be continued.

Most Latter-day Saints know the formula for revelation given in section 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants—the verses about studying it out in your mind and the Lord promising to confirm or deny. What most of us don't read in conjunction with this is the section which precedes it: section 8.

In that revelation the Lord has said, "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart." I love the combination there of both mind and heart. God will teach us in a reasonable way and in a revelatory way—mind and heart combined—by the Holy Ghost. "Now, behold," He continues, "*this is the spirit of revelation; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground.*" 6

Why would the Lord use the example of crossing the Red Sea as the classic example of "the spirit of revelation"? Why didn't He use the First Vision? Or the example from the book of Moses we just used? Or the vision of the brother of Jared? Well, He could have used any of these, but He didn't. Here He had another purpose in mind.

Usually we think of revelation as a downpour of information. But this is too narrow a concept of revelation. May I suggest how section 8 broadens our understanding, particularly in light of these "fights of affliction" we have been discussing.

Questions Often Precede Revelation

First of all, revelation almost always comes in response to a question, usually an urgent question—not always, but usually. In that sense it does provide information, but it is urgently needed information, special information. Moses' challenge was how to get himself and the children of Israel out of this horrible predicament they were in. There were chariots behind them, sand dunes on every side, and a lot of water immediately ahead. He needed information to know

what to do, but it wasn't a casual thing he was asking. In this case it was literally a matter of life and death.

You will need information too, but in matters of great consequence it is not likely to come unless you want it urgently, faithfully, humbly. Moroni calls it seeking "with real intent." 7 If you can seek that way and stay in that mode, not much that the adversary can counter with will dissuade you from a righteous path. You can hang on, whatever the assault and affliction, because you have paid the price for real conviction.

Like Moses in that vision, there may come after the fact some competing doubts and confusion, but it will pale when you measure it against the real thing. *Remember the real thing.* Remember how urgently you have needed help in earlier times and you got it. The Red Sea will open to the honest seeker of revelation. The adversary has power to hedge up the way, to marshal Pharaoh's forces and dog our escape right to the water's edge, but he can't produce the real thing. He cannot conquer if we will it otherwise. Exerting all our powers, the light will again come, the darkness will again retreat, the safety will be sure. That is lesson number one about crossing the Red Sea by the spirit of revelation.

Do Not Fear

Lesson number two is closely related. It is that in the process of revelation and making important decisions, fear plays a destructive, sometimes paralyzing role. To Oliver Cowdery, who missed the opportunity of a lifetime because he didn't seize it in the lifetime of the opportunity, the Lord said, "You did not continue as you commenced." Does that sound familiar to those who have been illuminated and then knuckled under to second thoughts and returning doubts? "It is not expedient that you should translate now," the Lord said in language that must have been very hard for Oliver to hear. "Behold, it was expedient when you commenced; *but you feared*, and the time is past, and it is not expedient now." 8

Everyone runs the risk of fear. For a moment in Moses' confrontation with the adversary, "Moses began to fear exceedingly; and as he began to fear, he saw the bitterness of hell." 9 That's when you see it—when you are afraid.

That is exactly the problem that beset the children of Israel at the edge of the Red Sea, and it has everything to do with holding fast to your earlier illumination. The record says, "And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid." Some (just like those Paul described earlier) said words to this effect: "Let's go back. This isn't worth it. We must have been wrong. That probably wasn't the right spirit telling us to leave Egypt." What they actually said to Moses was: "Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? ... It had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." 10 And I have to say, "What about that which has already happened? What about the miracles that got you here? What about the frogs and the lice? What about the rod and the serpent, the river and the blood? What about the hail, the locusts, the fire, the firstborn sons?"

How soon we forget. It would *not* have been better to stay and serve the Egyptians, and it is *not* better to remain outside the Church, nor to put off marriage, nor to reject a mission call or other Church service, and so on and so on forever. Of course our faith will be tested as we fight through these self-doubts and second thoughts. Some days we will be miraculously led out of Egypt—seemingly free, seemingly on our way—only to come to yet another confrontation, like all that water lying before us. At those times we must resist the temptation to panic and give up. At those times fear will be the strongest of the adversary’s weapons against us.

“And Moses said unto the people, *Fear ye not*, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. ... The Lord shall fight for you.” In confirmation the great Jehovah said to Moses, “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.” 11

That is the second lesson of the spirit of revelation. After you have gotten the message, after you have paid the price to feel His love and hear the word of the Lord, go forward. Don’t fear, don’t vacillate, don’t quibble, don’t whine. You may, like Alma going to Ammonihah, have to find a route that leads an unusual way, but that is exactly what the Lord is doing here for the children of Israel. Nobody had ever crossed the Red Sea this way, but so what? There’s always a first time. With the spirit of revelation, dismiss your fears and wade in with both feet. In the words of Joseph Smith, “Brethren [and sisters], shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory!” 12

God Will Help Us

The third lesson from the Lord’s spirit of revelation in the miracle of crossing the Red Sea is that along with the illuminating revelation that points us toward a righteous purpose or duty, God will also provide the means and power to achieve that purpose. Trust in that eternal truth. If God has told you something is right, if something is indeed true for you, He will provide the way for you to accomplish it. That is true of joining the Church or raising a family, of going on a mission, or any one of a hundred other worthy tasks in life. Remember what the Savior said to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove. What was the problem in 1820? Why was Joseph not to join another church? It was at least in part because “they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.” 13 God’s grace is sufficient! The Lord would tell Joseph again and again that just as in days of old the children of Israel would be “led out of bondage by power, and with a stretched-out arm. ... Therefore, let not your hearts faint. ... Mine angels shall go up before you, and also my presence, and in time ye shall possess the goodly land.” 14

What goodly land? Well, your goodly land. Your promised land. Your new Jerusalem. Your own little acre flowing with milk and honey. Your future. Your dreams. Your destiny. I believe that in our own individual ways, God takes us to the grove or the mountain or the temple and there shows us the wonder of what His plan is for us. We may not see it as fully as Moses or Nephi or the brother of Jared did, but we see as much as we need to see in order to know the Lord’s will for us and to know that He loves us beyond mortal comprehension. I also believe that the adversary and his pinched, calculating little minions try to oppose such experiences and then try to darken them after they happen. But that is not the way of the gospel. That is not the way of a Latter-day Saint who claims as the fundamental fact of the Restoration the spirit of revelation.

Fighting through darkness and despair and pleading for the light is what opened this dispensation. It is what keeps it going, and it is what will keep you going. With Paul, I say to all of you:

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” 15

I acknowledge the reality of opposition and adversity, but I bear witness of the God of glory, of the redeeming Son of God, of light and hope and a bright future. I promise you that God lives and loves you, each one of you, and that He has set bounds and limits to the opposing powers of darkness. I testify that Jesus is the Christ, the victor over death and hell and the fallen one who schemes there. The gospel of Jesus Christ is true, and it has been restored.

“Fear ye not.” And when the second and third and fourth blows come, “fear ye not. . . . The Lord shall fight for you.” 16 Cast not away therefore your confidence.

Gospel topics: adversity, dedication, faith, opposition, spirituality

Notes

1. See JS—H 1:15–17.
2. See 2 Ne. 2:11, 17–18.
3. Moses 1:1–2, 4, 8, 27–28.
4. Moses 1:12–16, 19–22.
5. Heb. 10:32, 35–36, 38–39; emphasis added.
6. D&C 8:2–3; emphasis added.
7. Moro. 10:4.
8. D&C 9:5, 10, 11; emphasis added.
9. Moses 1:20.
10. Ex. 14:10–12.
11. Ex. 14:13–15; emphasis added.
12. D&C 128:22.

13. JS—H 1:19.

14. D&C 103:17, 19–20.

15. Heb. 10:35–36.

16. Ex. 14:13–14.

[illustration] *First Vision*, by Liz Lemon Swindle

[photo] Photo by Steve Bunderson, posed by model; electronic composition by Patric Gerber

[illustration] Painting by Joseph Brickey

[illustration] Painting by Robert T. Barrett

[photo] Photo by Jed Clark

[illustration] *Moses Parting the Red Sea*, by Robert T. Barrett

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