

# **A Declaration to the World**



# A Declaration to the World

President Gordon B. Hinckley

My brothers and sisters, it is my great honor and pleasure to open this symposium commemorating the 150th anniversary of the British Mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I am one who believes in celebrations. I am one who believes in commemorating great events of the past. When we do so we bring to life, as it were, men and women of history who did significant things of which we need reminding. We all need to recognize that a tremendous price has been paid for the freedom we enjoy, the respect we enjoy, the comfort we enjoy as we live in this age of comparative ease and affluence.

The opening of the British Mission a century and a half ago was a declaration to the world: it was a declaration of a great millennial vision; it was an expression of tremendous faith; it was a demonstration of personal courage; and it was a statement of everlasting truth.

I do not intend to deal at length with the history of this event. There will be much of that given at this symposium and in many other meetings which will be held during the coming months. This celebration will reach its zenith on Sunday, 26 July, when five great conferences will be held simultaneously in the British Isles with members of the First Presidency, the Council of the Twelve, and the First Quorum of the Seventy participating with Latter-day Saints of the United Kingdom.

I repeat, the opening of the British Mission in 1837 was a declaration of a millennial vision. The resurrected Lord had said to his beloved disciples, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). That was a tremendous charge given a handful of men who had neither means nor standing before the world to carry out this encompassing mandate. They gave their lives in doing all that they could. John the Revelator in vision “saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6).

In these latter days, as Joseph Smith concluded his translation of the Book of Mormon, he arrived at the statement which has become part of the title page and which sets forth the book’s purpose—“to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.”

In the revelation given 1 November 1831, which became section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord said:

Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together.

For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated. . . .

And the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days.

And they shall go forth and none shall stay them, for I the Lord have commanded them. (D&C 1:1–2, 4–5)

This was a God-given mandate, a millennial mandate. It rested upon a handful of Latter-day Saints living in the farming communities of Kirtland and its environs in the 1830s. They had very little money. At tremendous sacrifice they had constructed a temple as “a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God” (D&C 109:8). With the dedication of that sacred edifice, the power of the adversary began to move through Kirtland, manifesting itself in a spirit of reckless speculation that diverted the minds of many from the things of God to the things of mammon. The United States at that time was gripped by this spirit of speculation which burst with catastrophic effects in the financial crash of 1837. In Kirtland, people turned against the Prophet Joseph Smith. There was bitterness, and there was greed. The Church was shaken, and a great sifting took place between the faithful and those whose eyes were set upon the things of the world. The problem was compounded by the fact that some members of the Church were in Ohio and others were in Missouri, separated by a distance of eight hundred miles and largely without communication.

Here were a people with a millennial vision and a responsibility that encompassed the entire world, but who were embroiled in difficulties sapping the very lifeblood of the Church. It was in these distressing times, on Sunday, 4 June 1837, that the Prophet Joseph Smith came to Heber C. Kimball, while Brother Kimball “was seated in front of the stand, above the sacrament table, on the Melchizedek side of the Temple, in Kirtland, and whispering to [him], said, ‘Brother Heber, the Spirit of the Lord has whispered to me: Let my servant Heber go to England and proclaim my Gospel, and open the door of salvation to that nation.’”<sup>1</sup>

Imagine, if you will, one man, who at the time had very little of the goods of this world, telling another who had practically nothing, having just returned from a mission, that he was to go across the sea to open the work there. Wasn’t there enough to be done at home? They were on the frontier of the nation, and the entire membership of the Church probably did not

exceed fifteen thousand people. But there was a vision in the hearts of these men. It was a millennial vision that the gospel was to be preached to every nation before the end should come. Some work had been done in Canada, but that was just across the lake. Now they were speaking of crossing the sea to go to the British Isles. One can understand Heber C. Kimball's response. Feeling his weakness he said, "O, Lord, I am a man of stammering tongue, and altogether unfit for such a work; how can I go to preach in that land, which is so famed throughout Christendom for learning, knowledge, and piety; the nursery of religion; and to a people whose intelligence is proverbial!"<sup>22</sup>

The call of Heber C. Kimball and his associates to cross the sea to Britain was a declaration by the Prophet Joseph of the great destiny of this restored work. As I have read of the condition of the Saints in Ohio and Missouri at that time, and of the smallness of their number, I have marveled at the breadth of their vision. From that time forth there has never been a dimming of that vision. Through the years that followed, regardless of drivings, persecution, poverty, oppression, and every other force the adversary could exercise against them, the work has grown and expanded until today we have 203 missions and are teaching the gospel in seventy-five sovereign nations and eighteen territories, colonies, and possessions.

Much as has been done, the end is not yet. We have done practically nothing in many areas of the world, but as the doors of the nations open the messengers of truth will go forward in fulfillment of that great millennial vision which was opened in the dark days of Ohio and Missouri with the call of seven men to go to the British Isles.

Their response to that call was a magnificent expression of faith. Said Brother Kimball at the time:

The idea of such a mission was almost more than I could bear up under, I was almost ready to sink under the burden which was placed upon me.

However, all these considerations did not deter me from the path of duty; the moment I understood the will of my Heavenly Father, I felt a determination to go at all hazards, believing that He would support me by His almighty power and endow me with every qualification that I needed; and although my family was dear to me, and I should have to leave them almost destitute, I felt that the cause of truth, the gospel of Christ, outweighed every other consideration.<sup>3</sup>

Orson Hyde, Willard Richards, and Joseph Fielding responded with similar faith, and these four were joined in New York by John Goodson, Isaac Russell, and John Snyder, who came forward with comparable faith for that historic and significant undertaking.

Tuesday, 13 June, was the scheduled departure date for the four who were to leave Kirtland. One who looked in on the Kimball household that

morning described the prayer that was uttered by the father who was leaving and who then,

like the patriarchs, and by virtue of his office, laid his hands upon [the heads of his children] individually, leaving a father's blessing upon them, and commanding them to the care and protection of God, while he should be engaged in preaching the Gospel in a foreign land. While thus engaged his voice was almost lost in the sobs of those around, who tried in vain to suppress them. The idea of being separated from their protector and father for so long a time was indeed painful. He proceeded, but his heart was too much affected to do so regularly. His emotions were great, and he was obliged to stop at intervals, while the big tears rolled down his cheeks.<sup>4</sup>

Faith? Faith was all they had—faith and courage. They had no money. One of the brethren gave the coatless Heber a coat. One of the women gave him five dollars, with which he paid for passage for himself and Orson Hyde to Buffalo. En route to New York City, they went by way of Massachusetts and collected forty dollars from a brother of Willard Richards.

They met their associates in New York, and on Sunday, 25 June, noted that they fasted, prayed, administered the sacrament, and pleaded with the Lord for direction. Somehow they secured eighteen dollars each for passage to Liverpool. At 10:00 A.M. on 1 July, the packet ship *Garrick* of nine hundred tons drew anchor and hoisted sails, and they started across the sea.

What an expression of faith, and what a demonstration of courage! That courage carried with it a spirit of enthusiasm. After eighteen days and eighteen hours on the water, to cover a distance I flew on a Concorde in three hours and twenty minutes, the ship pulled into the Mersey River beside the dock at Liverpool. A small boat came alongside the larger ship. They boarded this, and when they were within six or seven feet of the dock Heber jumped to shore. They spent a few days in Liverpool seeking direction from the Lord, and then felt the whispering of the Spirit directing them to go thirty-one miles to the north to the town of Preston. There they found a city in a state of excitement over elections for members of Parliament. Queen Victoria had ascended the throne three days earlier and had called for a national election.

As they came up the street in Preston, a banner unfurled before them bearing the words "Truth will Prevail." This they adopted as the motto of their mission.

Their work immediately became a declaration of everlasting truth. As you know, they preached first in Vauxhall Chapel, whose minister was a brother of Joseph Fielding of their own group. That and their subsequent preachings led to the baptism of nine souls in the River Ribble the following Sunday.

From that July day in 1837, their message of truth has been repeated by thousands of missionaries who have followed them, and it has come to lodge in the hearts of hundreds of thousands who have accepted the gospel in the British Isles.

I am one of those missionaries who followed them. My sacrifice was not as great. I fear my faith was not as strong. Certainly my journey was not as tedious as was theirs. I traveled by train in 1933 from Salt Lake City to New York, and then took ship from New York to Plymouth, England. There were three of us in our group. Two stayed in London, and somehow, in the providence of the Lord, I, like Heber C. Kimball and his associates ninety-six years earlier, was sent to Preston. That was my first assignment and my first field of labor. I became as familiar with the places they knew and the streets they walked as they had been nearly a century earlier. My companion and I walked up and down the same road where they had seen that banner, "Truth will Prevail." In the evening of the day that I arrived in Preston, my companion, who was the district president, said we would go down to the marketplace and hold a street meeting. There, in the place which was familiar to Heber C. Kimball and his associates, Elder Bramwell and I raised our voices in a hymn, offered prayer, and preached the same gospel to a gathering crowd as those first missionaries had preached.

The house on Wilfred Street, where they stayed and had a terrible experience with evil spirits, was familiar to me. Years later, I took President Spencer W. Kimball there so that he might see where his grandfather had that terrifying experience. Each day as my companion and I walked along Manchester Road to and from our "digs," we passed Vauxhall Chapel again and again, as did those first missionaries when they preached within its walls the day after they arrived in Preston. I was there some years later when a bulldozer was knocking the old building down to make way for a housing project. I picked up a brick from that chapel, which I still have. The River Ribble with its old tram bridge, where the first baptisms were performed while hundreds of people looked on, was familiar to me. I took President and Sister Kimball to this site some years ago and took their picture there. That picture was used by them on their Christmas card that year.

Somehow I feel especially fortunate now to have been sent to Preston as my initial assignment. Not only did I labor there, but I labored in the surrounding towns where those first missionaries taught the gospel. I was not as effective as were they. When they first arrived, there evidently was little or no prejudice against them. When I arrived, it seemed that everyone was prejudiced against us. A short time before I arrived, two missionaries unfortunately had been sent home because of violation of mission rules. The people in the city knew of their behavior, and this aggravated their antagonism toward us. I was not well when I arrived. Those first few weeks,

because of illness and the opposition which we felt, I was discouraged. I wrote a letter home to my good father and said that I felt I was wasting my time and his money. He was my father and my stake president, and he was a wise and inspired man. He wrote a very short letter to me which said, "Dear Gordon, I have your recent letter. I have only one suggestion, forget yourself and go to work." Earlier that morning in our scripture class my companion and I had read these words of the Lord: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8:35).

Those words of the Master, followed by my father's letter with his counsel to forget myself and go to work, went into my very being. With my father's letter in hand, I went into our bedroom in the house at 15 Wadham Road, where we lived, and got on my knees and made a pledge with the Lord. I covenanted that I would try to forget myself and lose myself in his service.

That July day in 1933 was my day of decision. I do not say it egotistically. I say it humbly and with gratitude. A new light came into my life and a new joy into my heart. The fog of England seemed to lift, and I saw the sunlight. I had a rich and wonderful mission experience, for which I shall ever be grateful, laboring in Preston where the work began and in other places where it had moved forward, including the great city of London, where I served the larger part of my mission.

As I stand before you today, my heart is filled with gratitude. I feel humble and grateful. I feel thankful for the events of 1837, for the call by the Prophet Joseph to those early missionaries to go to Britain in declaration of a great millennial vision, in expression of a tremendous faith, in demonstration of personal courage, with a statement of everlasting truth. I am profoundly grateful that I had the privilege and opportunity of walking in their footsteps, and that while laboring on the ground which they hallowed by their efforts there came into my heart a great consuming love for this work of God and for his Beloved Son, the Redeemer of the world, in whose name we serve.

God be thanked for this glorious gospel of his Beloved Son, restored to earth in this the dispensation of the fullness of times.

God be thanked for the Prophet Joseph, through whom that restoration came, and for the revelation given and received only seven years after the founding of the Church to take the gospel across the sea to the Isles of Britain.

God be thanked for the faith of those who, with neither purse nor scrip, sailed the ocean and began the work which has gone forward without interruption now for a century and a half. From there the work spread to Europe, and now to much of the world.

The infusion of the blood of Britain into the weakened body of the Church in 1837 and in the years that followed gave needed strength. From those isles came thousands of converts, many with great skills which became useful in building Nauvoo and, later, the communities of these western valleys. I never look upon the magnificent Salt Lake Temple and Tabernacle, and the other Utah temples, the Lion and Beehive Houses, and various other Church structures that I do not marvel at their handiwork. Hundreds died on the journey to these mountain valleys. But they and those who lived to settle here have left a residual of faith consonant with that carried by the small group who in 1837 crossed the sea and cast the gospel net in England.

In this season of commemoration, may we remember them and honor them for that which they undertook in faith and which has become an empire of eternal truth, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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1. Joseph Smith, Jr., *The History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1946–50): 2:490.
2. Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1945), 104.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 108–9.