

Excerpts from Chapter 9 of the book, “Doctrines of the Restoration”

Revelation on Priesthood,
by Elder Bruce R. McConkie

Personal Testimony of Revelation on Priesthood

I was present when the Lord revealed to President Spencer W. Kimball that the time had come, in His eternal providences, to offer the fulness of the gospel and the blessings of the holy priesthood to all men.

I was present, with my brethren of the Twelve and the counselors in the First Presidency, when all of us heard the same voice and received the same message from on high.

It was on a glorious June day in 1978. All of us were together in an upper room in the Salt Lake Temple. We were engaged in fervent prayer, pleading with the Lord to manifest his mind and will concerning those who are entitled to receive his holy priesthood. President Kimball himself was mouth, offering the desires of his heart and of our hearts to that God whose servants we are.

In his prayer President Kimball asked that all of us might be cleansed and made free from sin so that we might receive the Lord's word. He counseled freely and fully with the Lord, was given utterance by the power of the Spirit, and what he said was inspired from on high. It was one of those rare and seldom-experienced times when the disciples of the Lord are perfectly united, when every heart beats as one, and when the same Spirit burns in every bosom.

Perfect Unity Among Presidency and Twelve

. . . After this meeting, which was one of great spiritual uplift and enlightenment, all of the Brethren except those in the Presidency and the Twelve were excused.

President Kimball Directs

When we were alone by ourselves in that sacred place where we meet weekly to wait upon the Lord, to seek guidance from his Spirit, and to transact the affairs of his earthly kingdom, President Kimball brought up the matter of the possible conferral of the priesthood upon those of all races. This was a subject that the group of us had discussed at length on numerous occasions in the preceding weeks and months. The President restated the problem involved, reminded us of our prior discussions, and said he had spent many days alone in this upper room pleading with the Lord for an answer to our prayers. He said that if the answer was to continue our present course of denying the priesthood to the seed of Cain, as the Lord had theretofore directed, he was prepared to defend that decision to the death. But, he said, if the long-sought day had come in which the curse of the past was to be removed, he thought we might prevail upon the Lord so to indicate. He expressed the hope that we might receive a clear answer one way or the other so the matter might be laid to rest.

The Brethren Share Feelings

At this point President Kimball asked the Brethren if any of them desired to express their feelings and views as to the matter in hand. We all did so, freely and fluently and at considerable length, each person stating his views and manifesting the feelings of his heart. There was a marvelous outpouring of unity, oneness, and agreement in council. This session continued for somewhat more than two hours. Then President Kimball suggested that we unite in formal prayer and said,

modestly, that if it was agreeable with the rest of us he would act as voice.

Brethren Unite in Prayer

It was during that prayer that the revelation came. The Spirit of the Lord rested mightily upon us all; we felt something akin to what happened on the day of Pentecost and at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. From the midst of eternity, the voice of God, conveyed by the power of the Spirit, spoke to his prophet. The message was that the time had now come to offer the fulness of the everlasting gospel, including celestial marriage, and the priesthood, and the blessings of the temple, to all men, without reference to race or color, solely on the basis of personal worthiness. And we all heard the same voice, received the same message, and became personal witnesses that the word received was the mind and will and voice of the Lord.

President Kimball's prayer was answered and our prayers were answered. He heard the voice and we heard the same voice. All doubt and uncertainty fled. He knew the answer and we knew the answer. And we are all living witnesses of the truthfulness of the word so graciously sent from heaven.

A Powerful Witness

In the days that followed the receipt of the new revelation, President Kimball and President Ezra Taft Benson- the senior and most spiritually experienced ones among us- both said, expressing the feelings of us all, that neither of them had ever experienced anything of such spiritual magnitude and power as was poured out upon the Presidency and the Twelve that day in the upper room in the house of the Lord. And of it I say: I was there; I heard the voice; and the Lord be praised that it has come to pass in our day.

"All Are Alike unto God"

. . . I shall give you a few impressions relative to what has happened, and then attempt--if properly guided by the Spirit--to indicate to you the great significance that this event has in the Church, in the world, and where the rolling forth of the great gospel is concerned.

. . .

Time Had Come in the Lord's Timetable

Obviously, the Brethren had had a great anxiety and concern about this problem for a long period of time, and President Spencer W. Kimball had been exercised and had sought the Lord in faith. When we seek the Lord on a matter, with sufficient faith and devotion, he gives us an answer. You will recall that the Book of Mormon teaches that if the Apostles in Jerusalem had asked the Lord, he would have told them about the Nephites (3 Ne. 15:18-24; 16:4). But they did not ask, and they did not manifest the faith and they did not get an answer. One underlying reason for what happened to us is that the Brethren asked in faith; they petitioned and desired and wanted an answer--President Kimball in particular. And the other underlying principle is that in the eternal providences of the Lord, the time had come for extending the gospel to a race and a culture to whom it had previously been denied, at least as far as all of its blessings are concerned. So it was a matter of faith and righteousness and seeking on the one hand, and it was a matter of the divine timetable on the other hand. The time had arrived when the gospel, with all its blessings and obligations, should go to the Negro.

President Kimball Offers Inspired Prayer

Thus, in that setting, on the first day of June 1978, the First Presidency and the Twelve, after full

discussions of the proposition and all the premises and principles that are involved, importuned the Lord for a revelation.

President Kimball was mouth, and he prayed with great faith and great fervor; this was one of those occasions when an inspired prayer was offered. You know the Doctrine and Covenants' statement that if we pray by the power of the Spirit we will receive answers to our prayers and it will be given us what we shall ask (D&C 50:30). It was given the President what he should ask. He prayed by the power of the Spirit, and there was a perfect unity, total and complete harmony, between the Presidency and the Twelve on the issue involved.

Revelation Came--and Comes--by Holy Ghost

And when President Kimball finished his prayer, the Lord gave a revelation by the power of the Holy Ghost. Revelation primarily comes by the power of the Holy Ghost. Always that member of the Godhead is involved. But most revelations, from the beginning to now, have come in that way. There have been revelations given in various ways on other occasions. The Father and the Son appeared in the Sacred Grove. Moroni, an angel from heaven, came relative to the Book of Mormon and the plates and relative to instructing the Prophet in the affairs that were destined to occur in this dispensation. There have been visions, notably the vision of the degrees of glory. There may be an infinite number of ways that God can ordain that revelations come. But, primarily, revelation comes by the power of the Holy Ghost. The principle is set forth in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 68:3-4), that whatever the elders of the Church speak, when moved upon by the power of the Holy Ghost, shall be scripture, shall be the mind and will and voice of the Lord.

Presidency and Twelve United Witnesses

On this occasion, because of the importuning and the faith, and because the hour and the time had arrived, the Lord in his providences poured out the Holy Ghost upon the First Presidency and the Twelve in a miraculous and marvelous manner, beyond anything that any then present had ever experienced. The revelation came to the President of the Church; it also came to each individual present. There were ten members of the Council of the Twelve and three of the First Presidency there assembled. The result was that President Kimball knew, and each one of us knew, independent of any other person, by direct and personal revelation to us, that the time had now come to extend the gospel and all its blessings and all its obligations, including the priesthood and the blessings of the house of the Lord, to those of every nation, culture, and race, including the black race. There was no question whatsoever as to what happened or as to the word and message that came.

The revelation came to the President of the Church, and in harmony with Church government, was announced by him; the announcement was made eight days later over the signature of the First Presidency. But in this instance, in addition to the revelation coming to the man who would announce it to the Church and to the world, and who was sustained as the mouthpiece of God on earth, the revelation came to every member of the body that I have named. They all knew it in the temple.

Eternal Import of This Revelation

In my judgment this was done by the Lord in this way because it was a revelation of such tremendous significance and import; one that would reverse the whole direction of the Church, procedurally and administratively; one that would affect the living and the dead; one that would affect the total relationship that we have with the world; one, I say, of such significance that the

Lord wanted witnesses who could bear record that the thing had happened.

Now, if President Kimball had received the revelation and had asked for a sustaining vote, obviously he would have received it and the revelation would have been announced. But the Lord chose this other course, in my judgment, because of the tremendous import and the eternal significance of what was being revealed. This affects our missionary work and all of our preaching to the world. This affects our genealogical research and all of our temple ordinances. This affects what is going on in the spirit world, because the gospel is preached in the spirit world preparatory to men's receiving the vicarious ordinances that make them heirs to salvation and exaltation. This is a revelation of tremendous significance.

Revelation Affects Both Sides of the Veil

The vision of the degrees of glory begins by saying, "Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth" (D&C 76:1). In other words, in that revelation the Lord was announcing truth to heaven and to earth because those principles of salvation operate on both sides of the veil; and salvation is administered to an extent here to men, and it is administered to another extent in the spirit world. We correlate and combine our activities and do certain things for the salvation of men while we are in mortality, and then certain things are done for the salvation of men while they are in the spirit world awaiting the day of resurrection.

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Revelation Incomprehensible to Carnal Mind

There is no way to describe in language what is involved. This cannot be done. You are familiar with the Book of Mormon references where the account says that no tongue could tell and no pen could write what was involved in the experience and that it had to be felt by the power of the Spirit (3 Ne. 19:32; see also 3 Ne. 17:15-17). This was one of those occasions. . . .

This Revelation a Sign of the Times

This is a brief explanation of what was involved in this new revelation. I think I can add that it is one of the signs of the times. It is something that had to occur before the Second Coming. It was something that was mandatory and imperative in order to enable us to fulfill all of the revelations that are involved, in order to spread the gospel in the way that the scriptures say it must spread before the Lord comes, in order for all of the blessings to come to all of the people, according to the promises. It is one of the signs of the times.

All the Brethren United in Testimony

This revelation that came on the first day of June 1978 was reaffirmed by the spirit of inspiration one week later on June 8, when the Brethren approved the document that was to be announced to the world. And then it was reaffirmed the next day, on Friday, June 9, with all of the General Authorities present in the temple, that is, all who were available. All received the assurance and witness and confirmation by the power of the Spirit that what had occurred was the mind, the will, the intent, and the purpose of the Lord.

God Guiding the Church

This is a wondrous thing; the veil is thin. The Lord is not far distant from his church.

President Kimball is a man of almost infinite spiritual capacity --a tremendous spiritual giant. The Lord has magnified him beyond any understanding or expression and has given him His

mind and His will on a great number of vital matters that have altered the course of the past -- one of which is the organization of the First Quorum of the Seventy. As you know, the Church is being guided and led by the power of the Holy Ghost, and the Lord's hand is in it. There is no question whatever about that. And we are doing the right thing where this matter is concerned.

Great Gratitude Because of This Revelation

There has been a tremendous feeling of gratitude and thanksgiving in the hearts of members of the Church everywhere, with isolated exceptions. There are individuals who are out of harmony on this and on plural marriage and on other doctrines, but for all general purposes there has been universal acceptance; and everyone who has been in tune with the Spirit has known that the Lord spoke, and that his mind and his purposes are being manifest in the course the Church is pursuing.

We talk about the scriptures being unfolded--read again the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16) and remind yourselves that those who labor through the heat of the day for twelve hours are going to be rewarded the same as those who came in at the third and sixth and eleventh hours. Well, it is the eleventh hour; it is the Saturday night of time. In this eleventh hour the Lord has given the blessings of the gospel to the last group of laborers in the vineyard. And when he metes out his rewards, when he makes his payments, according to the accounts and the spiritual statements, he will give the penny to all, whether it is for one hour or twelve hours of work. All are alike unto God, black and white, bond and free, male and female. (Priesthood [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981], pp. 126-37.)

(See Daily Living home page; Church History home page; Blacks home page)

Notes

1. Illustrating the perfect harmony that exists between the doctrine and practice of the Church both here and in the spirit world, Elder McConkie said to a family gathering in Colorado Springs, on July 26, 1978, "This means that the same revelation had to be given to the Brethren in the Church in the spirit world, so that they can conform their preaching of the gospel to our new system on earth."

At that same gathering, to dramatize the significance of this revelation, he said, "This revelation is something in the same category as the revelation which caused Wilford Woodruff to issue the Manifesto."