

# "I Will Manifest Myself to My People in Mercy in This House": Temples—Kirtland, Nauvoo, and Today

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Eighteen hundred and twenty. One hundred and seventy years ago. A grove of trees—a fourteen-year-old boy with a question. We don't know the day of the week or the number on the calendar, but we do know it was spring. Spring in every sense of the word. When truth that slept—seemingly dead and lifeless—began to wake up, to send forth vibrant shoots that would change the world.

On that glorious spring day, the die was cast—an obscure farm boy would spend his life—all of his spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, and social energy—bent toward one purpose: to understand and put in place, piece by piece, the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Joseph would finally be finished miles and miles from Palmyra—on a bend in the Mississippi River, above a red brick store in the year 1844, just weeks before his death. On that April day he said to his associates: "Now if they kill me you have [got] all the keys, and all the ordinances, and you can confer them upon others, and the hosts of Satan will not be able to tear down the kingdom as fast as you will be able to build it up."<sup>1</sup> From a fourteen-year-old boy to a thirty-nine-year-old prophet. From Palmyra, New York, to Nauvoo, Illinois. From a grove of trees to the highest ordinances of the Holy Temple.

And now another spring. The awakening time of a millennial year. A dedicated temple, with all of the keys and all of the ordinances looking down on that quiet grove of trees in Palmyra. A sacred grove. A sacred temple. Only the ancient word *Hosanna* comes near to expressing what we feel. We are reassured that because of temples and what they mean, Satan will not be able to tear down the kingdom as fast as we will be able to build it up. From temples we go forth . . . armed with His power, His name upon us, His glory round about us, and His angels over us (D&C 109:22).

Temples are an expression of the Savior's love and mercy—His outstretched hand—offering us a way to return to the presence of the Father in spite of our sins and shortcomings. The ordinances of the temple invite us and all of our kindred dead to receive

the fullness. When we have a temple, we have everything the Father has to offer us on this earth.

Like all of you, I am filled with temples—with the wonder of temple after temple being built and dedicated in great cities and isolated towns. Surely, they are evidence of the hastening of the work promised by the Lord (D&C 88:73).

In a very personal way, I have wanted to think more, know more, and do more about temples. In the past few months I have taken my first wobbly steps into family history. When I have attended the temple, I have felt more attentive and alive to the ordinances. I have read and re-read dedicatory prayers in the *Church News*—each prepared after prayer for each individual temple. In short, I have felt compelled to understand everything I can about the temple—the final piece of Joseph Smith’s mission of restoration. With this in mind, it occurred to me how little I knew about the Kirtland and Nauvoo temples, and so I embarked on a wonderful personal study adventure. I have read pages and pages about the Kirtland and the Nauvoo temples, believing that as I understand more about these foundation temples—the first two temples of the Restoration—I will understand more about temples today.

I have not been disappointed—just frustrated as I stand before you with only a few minutes when I would love to be sitting on the porch with the luxury of an unhurried, but lively, conversation about the wonder of temples.

Oh, well.

This is ridiculous, but how about six minutes for Kirtland, six for Nauvoo, and then the remaining time for the present, that is, what we have learned that might enrich our own temple experience. To keep us focused, I would like you to listen for some recurrent themes that surfaced in my study: sacrifice, personal purity, preparation, protection, and power.

Kirtland: January 1836

Oh, what a happy and bustling community of enthusiastic Saints. They were on fire with the unfolding truths of the gospel. The school of the prophets was flourishing—preparing priesthood holders for missionary work. The participants in the school stretched their minds, learning about the wonders of the Universe, studying Hebrew, geography, astronomy, and delving deeply in the plan of God. The stone quarry hummed as the temple walls rose higher, the printing office was operating, patriarchal blessings were given by Father Smith, marriages, meetings, choir rehearsals, spinning, sewing, rejoicing. Missionaries were called home in anticipation of receiving an endowment. Housing was cramped as new converts arrived daily. There was a spirit of open doors and open hearts as newcomers crowded in with those who had homes. Even with a growing number of apostates and the persecution from without, even with painful family separations as individuals left behind loved ones who would not follow Mormonism, even with poverty and constant sacrifice, there was an exuberance about this community as the temple approached completion.

Caroline Barnes Crosby, convert and newly-wed of just one year: "We reached Kirtland the 7<sup>th</sup> of January, [1836]. The first person that we saw was . . . one of the young men who first brought the gospel to Mass[achusetts] at the time my husband was baptized. He assisted us in getting our wagon up the hill near the temple. . . . [We] were soon introduced to a score of brethren and sisters, who made us welcome among them. I ever felt myself quite at home in their society."[2](#)

Although the temple would not be dedicated until the end of March, Joseph began giving the promised endowment on January 21, 1836. After doing so, he reported that "the heavens were opened upon us," and he "beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof." He saw the "blazing throne of God, whereon was seated the Father and the Son." Others also saw the face of the Savior, and were ministered unto by holy angels."[3](#) " Roger Orton reported that he saw 'a mighty angel riding upon a horse of fire, with a flaming sword in his hand, followed by five others, [who] encircled the [temple], and protected the Saints . . . from the power of Satan and a host of evil spirits.'[4](#) These were just a few of the Pentecostal outpourings experienced in the weeks before and after the dedication of the temple. W. W. Phelps penned the stirring anthem, "The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning," sung at the dedicatory service on March 27. The Savior himself appeared on April 3, the Sunday following the dedication. The faithful rejoiced in the season—knowing it was a time of preparation for spreading the glad news abroad. The first mission abroad would begin with Heber C. Kimball in 1837.

Caroline: "I well recollect the sensations with which my mind was actuated when I learned the fact that my husband had been called and ordained to the Melchizedek priesthood and would undoubtedly be required to travel and preach the gospel to the nations of the earth. I realized in some degree the immense responsibility of the office, and besought the Lord for grace and wisdom to be given him that he might be able to magnify his high and holy calling."[5](#)

Amid all of the activity of the day, preparation of the temple and individual preparation were of prime importance. Lucy Mack Smith: "There was but one mainspring to all our thoughts and actions, and that was, the building of the Lord's house."[6](#)

In my studies, I learned that the Kirtland endowment was not the same endowment that would be given in Nauvoo and in subsequent temples. It was a preparatory or initiatory endowment. It was given only to men and was seen as preparatory to missionary service. It promised needed protection and blessings upon the heads of those who would leave without purse or script. In the Charge to the Twelve, Oliver Cowdery told the brethren "You will see what you never expected to see. You will need the mind of Enoch or Elijah and the faith of the brother of Jared. You must be prepared to walk by faith, however appalling the prospect to human view."[7](#)

In a powerful statement, Joseph Smith described one of the purposes of the endowment: "It [the endowment] is calculated to unite our hearts, that we may be one in feeling and sentiment, and that our faith may be strong, so that Satan cannot overthrow us, nor have any

power over us."§

In spite of this wonderful possibility, even those who had received the endowment would be found among Joseph's most bitter apostates as they reacted to the bank failure the next year. Persecution from within and without increased. Joseph fled to Missouri. The faithful followed, abandoning the temple to those who would soon use the dedicated building to shelter their animals. Hay and animals on the pulpits of the priesthood. . . .

In summary: In the Kirtland Temple no full endowments were given; no marriages or sealings were performed; no baptisms for the dead or other vicarious work for the dead. From our viewpoint might we say, "What? Three years of incredibly difficult work, \$60,000 from a poverty-stricken people, only a preparatory endowment given to the men? This huge effort for a building that would be used for less than two years before apostasy and other forces forced abandonment?"

Hmmm.

But, that was not the reaction of the faithful. Look again. Could there possibly be too much work, too much money, too much sacrifice, or too little use for a temple where the mortal world and the heavens would meet; where the veil over the earth would burst; where individuals would receive knowledge and power to resist Satan; where Elijah would restore keys that would eventually allow work to go forward for those beyond the veil; where the Savior himself would come, saying, "Behold, I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house" (D&C 110:7)?

Nauvoo

Now jump across time and space—across Missouri and on to Nauvoo. An unhealthy climate, poverty, persecution, and the continuing challenge and excitement of a constant stream of new converts. In the midst of this, the Lord said to His people, "Come ye, with all your gold, and your silver, and your precious stones . . . with iron, with copper, and with brass, and with zinc, and with all your precious things of the earth; and build a house to my name, for the Most High to dwell therein. For there is not a place found on earth that he may come to and restore again that which was lost unto you, or which he hath taken away, even the fullness of the priesthood" (D&C 124:26–28).

Now, I learned something else about temple beginnings. In Kirtland the preparatory endowment was only offered to the living, and then only to Melchizedek priesthood holders. But Elijah came to Kirtland. So, now, in Nauvoo, Joseph began to teach baptisms for the dead. In contrast to Kirtland, the Nauvoo Temple would have a baptismal font—on the backs of twelve oxen. The Saints rejoiced as they were baptized for their dead.

In Nauvoo, there would not be a single grand dedication such as had occurred in Kirtland. The times were too chaotic, the Saints too beset by persecutors. Rather, there was a series of dedications: first the baptismal font, then subsequent floors, then a secret dedication, followed by a public one. Joseph administered the complete endowment to his associates—

above the red brick store, before the temple could be used. In contrast to Kirtland, women were included, Emma being the first with others joyously following. The new and everlasting covenant of marriage was revealed and husbands and wives were sealed together. The joy of the Saints knew no bounds. God surely was restoring knowledge and power.

In April 1844, before the temple was completed and two months before he was martyred, Joseph Smith met with the Twelve above the red brick store and carefully instructed them, giving them the keys to administer all of the ordinances of the temple. With this act, Joseph Smith finished his work. His desire to see the temple itself completed would not be granted. None of us knows why he was denied this, but looking back, it is easy to recognize that finishing the temple provided a rallying point for a people who might have disintegrated with the martyrdom of their beloved leader. The temple provided a holy, urgent, and immediate goal—something consuming and uniting they could do with their grief: Finish the temple; complete the mandate of their beloved Joseph. At the same time, they knew that receiving their own endowments would prepare them for the exodus to the west—they would have the protection and power they needed to face challenge ahead. They wanted to receive the "things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fullness of times" (D&C 124:41). They wanted this so desperately that Brigham Young acquiesced to their pleas and kept the temple open, ministering night and day. On February 7, upwards of 600 received the ordinances. At the close of that session, the doors were closed and were never opened again for that type of temple service.<sup>9</sup> Of the following day, Brigham Young later wrote: "We knelt around the altar, and dedicated the building to the Most High. We asked his blessing upon our intended move to the west; also asked him to enable us some day to finish the Temple, and dedicate it to him, and we would leave it in his hands to do as he pleased."<sup>10</sup>

It took five years to build the Nauvoo Temple, costing the beleaguered Saints \$1 million. It would be thirty-one long years before the Saints would worship in another dedicated temple. In Utah, the final piece would be put into place, as they received instruction to extend initiatory work, endowments, and sealings to the dead. Elijah came to Kirtland, baptisms for the dead were instituted in Nauvoo, and the other ordinances for the dead were instituted in Utah. The keys Elijah brought in 1836 were finally in full operation.

Today

And now today. It continues. Temples fill our thoughts and actions. It is difficult to put into words the unity we feel as members of the Church as we play our part. Surely we felt that unity as we joined together in the dedication of the Palmyra Temple on April 6.

Think of the words associated with temples—the ones I mentioned in the beginning: *sacrifice, purity of heart, preparation, protection, power*. We hear them echo in Kirtland and Nauvoo. How do we hear them today, in our own temple worship?

*Sacrifice*. What does it mean to us? We aren't the women of Nauvoo sewing shirts for the men who worked on the temple. We don't spin, weave, or give crushed china to mix with

the plaster in Kirtland. But we tithe our income. One of the great blessings of developing the habit of paying tithing—particularly if you started doing it as a small child—is that you simply don't miss it. Don't even think about it. And yet, our tithing is literally our spinning and weaving. It is certainly one way we sacrifice. In the past few months I have stopped myself when I contemplate an item that I would like to buy but can't afford. I have said: "Actually, I could afford that if we hadn't paid tithing this month." Then I have the thrill of saying: "I would much rather pay tithing than have that item!" This may seem silly to you, but it has increased my awareness of the joy of paying tithing.

When our daughter, Amy, was very young, we walked her over to the bishop's house to pay her tithing one Sunday afternoon. On the way over she wanted to know what tithing was used for. Among other things, her father told her that it is used to build temples. Later that week, reading the newspaper, we commented that the announcement had been made to build a new temple in Taiwan. She looked up delightedly and said, "They got my money just in time!" That's an exclamation we can all make every time a temple is announced.

There is so much more about sacrifice in temple worship. Is there a more precious commodity in our day than time? Whether it be a temple trip requiring days or a drive across town with a total time of three hours—it is time, and as such, a personal sacrifice.

*Purity of heart.* It is impossible to talk about sacrifice without talking about purity of heart. A pure heart is both the antecedent and consequence of sacrifice. We make our sacrifices out of the purity of our hearts. We purify our hearts through sacrifice.

President Hinckley has said that we have not partaken of the gospel fully unless we have served vicariously for others. This work more nearly approaches the work of the Savior than any other. We give a gift without a possibility of receiving thanks—at least in this life—from the recipient. Doing work for the dead is a sacred and sanctifying work. [11](#) Yes. Serving vicariously is a sacrifice that purifies our hearts.

*Preparation.* With our historical hindsight, we can surmise that the Kirtland endowment prepared the brethren to go forth and spread the gospel as missionaries. We might say that the endowment in Nauvoo prepared the Saints for their grueling exodus to the west. What does the endowment prepare you and me for? I don't know, but I have some ideas. I think that you might agree with me that each of us probably has a grueling experience or two in our future. More than one event or circumstance that will require vision and faith and eternal perspective. Eternal perspective is what the temple offers us—and it offers it to us again and again as we are given the privilege of hearing it not just once but time after time as we stand proxy for others. The temple is a constant refresher of the great and meaningful things of life. Do you think that eternal perspective kept the Saints going when they fled from Kirtland and Missouri and Nauvoo? It made all the difference. Do you think it makes a difference now? The more clear our understanding of the Big Picture, the more energy we will have to live the details. Temples are a constant refresher of the great and meaningful things of life—they help us to sift through the clutter. Do we need this in an age of information overload? I do.

*Protection.* We are prepared for the future as we understand more completely the Plan. This understanding offers us protection. What kind of protection? There is no limit, I believe. But certainly the knowledge and understanding offered us in the temple protect us from Satan's cunning traps. Our very worthiness to enter the House of the Lord indicates that we are protected from the ravages of drugs, alcohol, immorality, and other assaults. The temple recommend we carry is an indication of our faith and works—and faith and works bring with them their own blessings of protection.

*Power.* Our worthiness allows us in our extremities to call down the powers of heaven. We pause in the celestial room, hearts open in prayer, knowing that God knows who we are, knows each sorrow, each heartache, each weakness, and yet He loves us completely. In the temple we approach Him who has the power to forgive. The temple *is* a house of forgiveness. In Solomon's ancient dedicatory prayer, he speaks movingly of this. Read it again in Chronicles and be inspired by it (2 Chronicles 6). This dedicatory prayer helps us understand that the temple is a place where we come to look inward and find our own shortcomings. We can rise above them and stand tall and He will forgive our sins. Each time we go to the temple it can be a time of repentance, an opportunity to turn our lives around. Does this give us power? Yes. It gives me the power to leave yesterday behind, get up in the morning, and try again. To keep going forward. To know that I can be better. It has been said that through the ordinances of the temple we actually have our natures changed to become like God. As we grow in spiritual power through temple participation, we will have more peace in our homes and love in our relationships.

President Hinckley, to us: "Keep the temple as busy or busier than it has been. The Lord will bless you and you will be happier. I make a promise to you that every time you come to the temple you will be a better man or woman when you leave than you were when you came. That is a promise. I believe it with all my heart."[12](#)

Keep thinking power. As you watch the downward spiral of our society as portrayed in the media, do you feel helpless? George Q. Cannon taught that the construction of temples "lessens the power of Satan on the earth and increases the power of God and Godliness, [and] moves the heavens in mighty power in our behalf."[13](#)

That means that with every announcement of and dedication of a temple reported in the newspaper, we can know that we are making headway against the forces of evil.

Sacrifice, purity of heart, preparation, protection, power. And much, much more. There is no end, because temples are the apex of our earthly experience, and so, within them we find the whole gospel. They represent the complete restoration—Joseph's mission—which in essence was a restoration of the mission of Jesus Christ. When we stand in temples, we stand by Joseph. And when we stand by Joseph, we stand by the Lord, Jesus Christ.

I close with expressions of gratitude to my Savior. Through the temple He has extended to me the highest and most sacred blessings available on this earth—at any time in the history of the earth. With each dedication of this multitude of new temples, I desire to re-dedicate myself to the purposes of the Lord—to prepare myself and do my part in preparing the earth

for His triumphal return, when we shall greet him with the Hosanna Shout expressing our love, reverence, and respect for God and the Lamb. (Lorenzo Snow)

In His Holy Name, Amen.

1. Joseph Smith, *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 19 (2 October 1844): 651. See also John Jacques, "The Life and Labors of Sidney Rigdon," *Improvement Era* 3, no. 8 (June 1900).
2. Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, Derr, Mulvay Derr, *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 46.
3. Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 288-89.
4. Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 292.
5. Godfrey, *Women's Voices*, 48.
6. Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother Lucy Mack Smith*, ed. Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 231.
7. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols., ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932-51), 2:197; punctuation standardized.
8. Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 301.
9. E. Cecil McGavin, *The Nauvoo Temple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1962), 69. See also Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:579-80.
10. McGavin, *Nauvoo Temple*, 70. See also Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:580.
11. See Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 366; *Church News*, 19 November 1994.
12. "President Hinckley Addresses 15,000 in Laie," *Church News*, 28 February 2000.
13. George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truths*, ed. Jerreld L. Newquist (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 366.