

The Restoration of the Church, Why Now? – Hyrum W. Smith

(From a devotional given at Ricks College, 27 September 1988.)

I have to tell you this is quite an awesome experience to stand before this many people. I have the opportunity of speaking fairly regularly in the corporate world, but rarely to four thousand people, and I want you to know that it's a great honor to be invited back. I'd like to express my love and appreciation to your president. My wife and I, as he mentioned, got to know the Christensens when we first went through the MTC as a new mission president and President Christensen attempted to teach us how to be a mission president in four days. Anyway, he's a wonderful guy. They're wonderful people. We had the opportunity of spending four days with them in Boston, this summer, where President Christensen was partially responsible for a national exploring conference and we were part of that. We had some fun with them. In fact, we were able to watch the fireworks on the Charles River with the Christensens. It was a neat summer.

As he mentioned that there are 1200 returned missionaries, I'd like to begin – this has nothing to do with my talk today, maybe it does, a little bit – I'd like to encourage all the young women in the room: serve missions. I married a returned missionary and think they're great. President Christensen married a returned missionary and he thinks they're great. Is that right? In fact, I'll even tell you that I met my wife in the mission field. It wasn't like that.

Anyway, I've had the opportunity the last six years of being asked to speak at the MTC on New Year's Eve. I've been the entertainment for 1800 missionaries for every New Year's Eve the last six years and I counsel those young brethren – there are always much fewer sisters there – but I counsel those young brethren that it is not appropriate to look for a wife in the mission field, but if they didn't keep their eyes open they were crazy. Are we recording this? But I am really serious about that, sisters. Seriously consider a mission. We need our young women out there just as badly as we need our young men.

What I'd like to do with you today is share with you my testimony as to why I believe the Church of Jesus Christ was restored when it was restored. One of the questions that is often asked of missionaries in the field or anyone who is investigating the Church for the first time is a) why a Restoration and b) if a Restoration was necessary, why did the Lord wait until 1820? Seems like there were a lot of people that lived and died between 96 A.D. and 1820. Why wait?

May I begin what I would share with you today by asking you if – by the way, if you have something on which to write today, I would ask you to produce that. I'm going to ask you to write some things down. I'm going to give you some dates that I think you'll find interesting. If you don't have anything on which to write, I think I could recommend something. That's a joke.

I'm going to share with you today a timeline of events that led up to the Restoration of the gospel and therein my testimony as to why 1820. I'd like to preface that testimony by taking you first to the book of John in the New Testament and go to the sixty-sixth verse. In the sixty-sixth verse of John, chapter six. As a preamble to this experience, you may be aware there was a terrific falling away taking place as a result of the persecutions which were now being heaped upon the saints. Because of this falling away, the Savior became concerned about this, so he gathered his brethren about him. Verse sixty-six, we read: "from that time, many of the disciples went back, and walked no more with him." In other words, they were falling away.

So he gets his apostles around him and he levels at them a very sobering question that I would level at you. Verse sixty-seven: "Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?" To me that's a very poignant experience. "Are you going to leave me too? It's not so much fun anymore, is it, brethren? They're not laying out leaves for us as we enter Jerusalem, now. They're trying to kill us now. It's not near as neat as it was a few years ago. Are you going to leave, too?"

Peter stands forth and responds on behalf of the twelve in verse sixty-eight, a little surprised, I think. “Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” In other words, “We leave you, where do we go? There isn’t any place to go.” In verse sixty-nine, he then bears a wonderful testimony. “And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” I would hope, brothers and sisters, and I am sure I can promise you today there will be a time when somebody’s going to stand up in front of you and say “You gonna leave, too?” Or, “You really believe all that?” And if your testimony is in the right place, you understand how you fit historically and you understand what Peter understood you’ll be able to stand for it as Peter did and said, “If I leave here, where do I go? There isn’t any place to go. I happen to know who He is.” And that’s what Peter said.

Now will you record some dates very quickly. I’d like to build a historical case for why I believe 1820 was the only time the gospel of Jesus Christ could have been restored and survive on the planet.

Start with the year 0 in your notes. Just write these very quickly. The year 0: the Savior was born. It wasn’t really the year 0. Five centuries later, they decided it ought to be the year 0 because that was a significant event, so it is now, in our calendars, the year 0.

30 A.D. is the next date you need to write. The Savior is now a grown man. We don’t know a great deal about His first thirty years. We have a scripture in Hebrews that says that “He grew in stature and wisdom” and that sort of thing, and not a lot about His first thirty years.

33 A.D., third date. Three years after His ministry He had established a church. Called and established a specific form for that church. Rejected by the people and He was crucified. 33 A.D. At that point, it was the charge of the apostles and the organization of the church at that point to go throughout the world, strengthen and build the church.

The next date you need to write is 42 A.D. In 42 A.D., Peter went to Rome and established the Church in Rome. He ordained a bishop in Rome by the name of Linus. Linus is the man to whom the Catholics retrace their historical lineage. In 43 A.D., the next date you need to write, Paul, performing the function that apostles still perform, went back to Rome to see how the church was doing.

Discovered that in one short year, the church under the Bishop Linus had completely apostatized from what Peter had established. Read the first chapter of Romans in the New Testament, understanding that that chapter was written upon Paul’s return from Rome and described what he found there. As a result of this apostasy that had taken place in Rome, Paul established a new leader of the church in Rome, a deacon by the name of Linus as well. History sort of gets messed up here between the two Linuses but understand the deacon Linus was the authorized leader of the Church of Jesus Christ in Rome. Bishop Linus was an aberrant church already.

The next date you need to write is 64 A.D. In 64 A.D., Nero, then in charge in Rome, a little screwy, but he had Linus the deacon killed. When Linus the deacon was killed, the Church of Jesus Christ – the authorized, sanctioned Church of Jesus Christ – disappeared from Rome. The Christian church under the Bishop Linus was still there and surviving.

The next date you need to write is 70 A.D. In 70 A.D., the Roman Tenth Legion came down through the Armageddon Valley under the direction of General Silva. Destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Between 70 A.D. and 1948, the Jewish people had nowhere to call home. They were spread throughout the world. No homeland for the Jews until 1948. That’s when the Massad Experience took place. They made a movie about that. You might remember the movie.

The next date we need to write is about 78 A.D. About I say because we’re not sure of the actual date – it was about 7 or 8 years after the destruction of Jerusalem. The Bishop Linus – at that point, the church was called the Church of Rome – received a letter from one of his people, and in the letter this person said, “You know, we really are a

universal church.” And Linus thought about that and said, “You know, we really are a universal church. We are trying to appeal to everyone in Rome. Why don’t we call ourselves the universal church?” At that point, they became known as the Roman Catholic Church.

The next date you need to write is 96 A.D. In 96 A.D., John, the Revelator, banished to the isle of Patmos. Understand, between 33 A.D. and 96 A.D., it was the role of the apostles to go out through the world and build the church. They had some success but not a lot. All of the apostles, save John, were killed, many of them in ugly ways. Peter, for example, was crucified in Rome. Didn’t feel worthy to be crucified the same way the Savior was so he asked if they would mind turning him upside down. They graciously accommodated him and he died on his head on a cross. 96 A.D., John is the last one left. He goes to the isle of Patmos. Between 96 and 101, the Book of Revelation is written and John disappears. Until latter-day revelation, no one ever knew what happened to John. But in 101 A.D., the apostasy was complete. No one on the earth now authoritatively capable of saying, “Thus saith the Lord” because no one on the earth was speaking to the Lord. The apostasy now complete.

The next date you need to write: 320 A.D. In 320 A.D. – understand between 101 and 320 A.D., life for the Christians was an ugly experience, even the Christians under the Bishop Linus. The Christians you read about in the catacombs of Rome were not the Christians that Paul had established, but they were the apostate group. They had an ugly time. In 320 A.D., Constantine, now in charge, he had an interesting problem. He had a nation of people of all different kinds of religions. He was bugged by that, and so he sent some of the learned people, about 380 of them, over to a place called Nicea and the first Nicene council was held. The charter was given to these people by Constantine and it was, “I want you to describe God. Define God. You tell me what God is all about and that’s the way everybody will believe.” They went away for several weeks and came back and presented Constantine with a document that is known as the Nicene Creed. Brothers and Sisters, if you have not read and are familiar with the Nicene Creed, you ought to be. Read it this week. In essence it says: “God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are one. They’re not really one, but they’re sort of one, because they’re kind of one, we think they ought to be one, therefore they are one.” Read it. You need to understand it. That document is the basic document now that is accepted by most of the Christian faiths in the world as a description of God.

We find now, the beginnings now, the Roman Catholic church now becomes the formal church of state. Up until this time, it was just trying to survive. Now it becomes *the church* and this is the way people are going to believe. A period in history begins now called the Reign of the Popes. Was this a religiously tolerant time, brothers and sisters? No. The popes were not just ecclesiastic leaders. They became emperors and kings as well.

The next date you need to write is 785 A.D. 785, Empress Irene was in charge. She had another council in the same place. She sent her learned people off to Nicea. In the Second Nicene Council, the canonization of saints takes place. Idol worship enters into the Catholic Church. Understand, brothers and sisters, that you cannot read European history and Catholic history as two separate histories. They are the same. Who wrote history back then? The only ones who could read and write were primarily the clergy, and a few wealthy.

Alright, the next date you need to write is 900 A.D. In approximately 900 – the exact date is not pinpointed – there was a woman pope. The Catholic Church denies this; the Lutheran Church has detailed documentation. There was a pope in charge. Four years into that reign as pope, this pope became pregnant. This was very embarrassing to the Catholic Church and she is known as Pope Joanna. She just disappeared. The next date you need to write is 1100 A.D. In 1100 A.D., there were three popes. They broke off from each other, three different European cities. They all excommunicated each other and then went to war to prove who was the only true and living pope.

I’m not here making fun of Catholic history. I’m here helping us understand. We need to understand the fact that the Apostasy was very real.

The next date we need to write is 1200 A.D. In 1200 A.D., two significant events took place. First, the advent of the printing press. Up until 1200 A.D., how many people could read? Not many. The printing press surfaces and has a major impact on the culture of Europe in the next hundred years. We'll talk about that in a moment.

The second event, the man in charge in Rome: Pope Innocent III. Pope Innocent III was known in history as The Boss Pope. He was fighting wars all the time. He was fighting on three fronts. Started to run out of money. Decided he needed a creative way of raising money for his wars. And so he initiated in the church a money-making program called the Sale of Indulgences. This is a significant event 300 years later; we'll discover why in a moment. The Sale of Indulgences simply means you can pay to have your sins remitted. I've often wondered why we don't do that. We could build lots of chapels. It even got to the point where you could prepay sins. "I'm going to Vegas for the weekend, Bishop. Here's a thousand bucks. Cover me." "You're covered."

The next date you need to write is 1300 A.D. 1300 A.D., a revolution begins in Europe, not a revolution of knives and swords, but a cultural revolution. That revolution is known and we refer to it now as The Renaissance. European culture turns upside-down. One of the reasons was the advent of the printing press. More people had more information. Questions started to be asked that never had been asked before and the culture turns upside down.

The next date we need to write is 1492. Surely, what happened in 1492? You got that right. Columbus, a product of the Renaissance, was part of a growing number of people that said, "You know, this is not a flat world. It's round." And so he conned the queen out of three boats and he finds the New World.

The next date we need to write, very few short years later, 1515 A.D. Martin Luther surfaces. I shared this with a group of young people in Utah not too long ago. I said, "Who was Martin Luther?" Kid jumps up. "Isn't he that black guy that got killed a few years ago?" No, different guy. 1515, Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, one of the highest orders in the Catholic Church, a product of the Renaissance, he had access to many of the ancient documents. He had a major problem. His problem was the Sale of Indulgences. He said, "I don't think that's right. I can't find anything in the ancient writings that the Savior said anything about the sale of indulgences."

Ultimately, he developed 95 questions that bothered him a lot. He nailed these questions to the door of the cathedral in Württemberg, Germany. That's how he communicated. Took several weeks for people to wander by and see the questions. It bugged the church a lot. He was then pulled before several church courts and told, "Back off with your questions or you'll be excommunicated." Understand that excommunication in the 14th, 15th centuries was tantamount to death. Martin Luther did not want to destroy the Catholic Church. He loved the Catholic Church. He wanted to get back to what was being taught at the time of Christ. The next several years was not a good experience for Martin Luther. He would not back off from his questions.

Next date you need to write is 1523. In 1523, Martin Luther was excommunicated from the church and the church put out a proclamation, saying, "We will not consider it murder to kill Martin Luther." They put out a papal hit on Martin Luther. He had to go into hiding. He was protected by a group of wealthy German princes. The German princes, quite frankly, I don't think were particularly interested in his theology, but they were not interested in paying tribute to Rome any more. And so they created a church. Finally they talked Martin Luther into heading that church. He didn't want to at first, but when they started trying to kill him, he decided he would. He became the head of the Lutheran Church. Brothers and sisters, if there is a people on the planet today that have a testimony of the Apostasy, it's the Lutheran Church. That's why they exist. They have documented it very carefully.

The next date you need to write is 1534. In 1534, King Henry VIII in England had a problem with his wife. He wanted to unload her. And so he went to the pope and said, "I want to divorce my wife." The pope said, "You can't do that. There is no divorce in the church." He looked over at Germany and said, "You know, Luther's doing all right. I think I'll create my own thing." And so he created the Church of England and it breaks from the Catholic Church. Was that a popular decision in England? Really wasn't. Many wars resulted. Ugly, terrible battles as a result

of that decision. He was able then to get rid of his wife. No revelation. No saying, "I talked to somebody in heaven." But he said, "I want to get rid of my wife." A church starts.

What church in America today is the Church of England? The Episcopal Church. The next date you need to write is 1540. I'm just mentioning a couple of the major reformers. By the way, go back to 1515 – the Reformation starts. There had been some earlier reformers but the major beginning of the Reformation really goes through Martin Luther. The reformation begins. 1540. Man by the name of John Calvin in Switzerland and France starts an organization called the Huguenots. He was a disciple of Martin Luther. Didn't agree with everything Luther was doing, but he said, "I think he's on the right track. Something's wrong." The Huguenots begin. Presbyterians in America today.

Next date is 1560. 1560 in England, John Knox. John Knox, a disciple of both Calvin and Luther, says "You know, I think they're on the right track but they're not totally on the right track. Think I'll start my own thing." And the Puritans begin. The next date you need to write is 1575. 1575, an event took place in Paris, France, called Bartholomew Day. This was not an isolated incident, but I plug this in here to give you an idea as to how the Reformation was being received in Europe. Bartholomew Day, a pogrom took place in Paris, France. The Catholics rose up and destroyed every Protestant they could find. There was a bloodbath in Paris. Bartholomew Day. The Reformation was not a popular movement.

The next date you need to write is 1620, not too many years later. What happened in 1620? The Puritans come to America. Fed up now with the lack of the freedoms that they wanted, they came to America. 1620, a nation is invented. It was discovered by Columbus. It was invented by the Puritans. The United States of America has its formal beginnings. Between 1620 and 1776, a nation is born.

The next date you need to write is 1776. 1776, we'd had enough. We wrote a letter to King George. It said something like this: "We're tired of your taxes. We don't like your troops over here. In fact, we don't like you. Will you take them home? We're going to be our own thing." Now that paraphrases the Declaration of Independence a little bit, but that's basically what it said. An ugly war begins. George was not very excited about that and for the next six years, a war. The Revolution. For some, miracle. May I suggest to you, having done a military study of the Revolution, there is no way that war could have been won without the direct intervention of God. I believe that with all my heart.

1781 is the next date you need to write. The war ends.

1785 is the next date. A meeting begins in Philadelphia. They discover the Articles of Confederation are not working. We need another document. It took two more years, until 1787, to finish the Constitution. For the first time, in the incorporating papers of any nation on the planet, a guarantee of the freedom of religion was written into the constitution. 1787, it is signed at Independence Hall in Philadelphia.

The next date you need to write is 1805. How many years between 1787 and 1805? Not very many. Who was born in 1805? Joseph Smith. Now, maybe – maybe – the Church can once again survive on the planet. A Prophet is born in upstate New York.

The next date you need to write is 1812. A significant war was fought in 1812. What was the name of that war? That's good. The War of 1812. That's a significant war. Why? This time, we beat the British with some definite win. We had our own navy now. The *USS Constitution* had been commissioned in 1797. We had a major win. They came up the Potomac River, leveled the White House, we didn't like that very much and we won soundly this time. We threw them off and we said, "No one will ever fight a war against us again on our own land." That was the last war fought with an external force on American soil. We had a little family trouble in 1860, but that was internal. Last war with an external force.

The next date you need to write is 1820. What happened in 1820? Joseph Smith, the boy prophet, goes into a grove of trees, wanting to know: “Something’s wrong. There are a lot of people teaching different things. What church should I join?” And the Lord and Jesus Christ appear to him and the Restoration begins.

The next date you need to write is 1830. 1830, the Church is formally established on the earth. You might be interested to know that in 1830, in Washington, DC, the patent office, the US Patent Office, was closed. You can read in the congressional record for that year, “We’ve decided to close the patent office because everything has been invented that could possibly be invented.” 1830. It’s been opened since. More progress on this planet since 1830, brothers and sisters, than in all 5,000 years past.

Now I’m going to ask you a question. Why was the gospel restored in 1820? Why didn’t the Lord appear to a young man in a grove of trees in Europe in 1512? If Martin Luther had come out of a grove of trees and said, “I just talked to God and Jesus Christ and you know that they said? We’re all messed up.” How long would he have survived? Twenty minutes, maybe? Not very long. I would suggest to you, brothers and sisters, that the reason the Lord restored the Church in 1820 is because that is the only time that it could possibly have survived on the planet. And it almost didn’t survive then. Was there religious freedom in America in 1830? No. Was Joseph Smith welcomed with “You talked to God and Christ? Boy, that’s exciting. Tell us what they had to say.” No, they weren’t excited about that. Ultimately, they had to leave the confines of the United States and come to a God-forsaken place called Salt Lake City to survive. Brigham Young did not say “This is the place.” He said, “This is the place?” No, that’s a joke. That’s a joke. That’s a joke. They had to come out here to survive.

There is another date we need to write in your notes. The date you need to superimpose, you need to go back to 1817 and write in the birth of another person over in Europe. A man by the name of Karl Marx. You know who Karl Marx was, I trust. Is there any coincidence that the opposition raised up its leader the same time the Lord raised up His? I don’t think there was a coincidence. Who’s winning? How many LDS people are there today? Six million. How many active? 6500 – no. Six million, or seven million. There are 700,000,000 communists. Is there a work for us to do?

Brothers and sisters, I would like to suggest to you today that the gospel of Jesus Christ was restored in 1820 because that’s the only time it could have survived. There is a more pointed question that needs to be asked. Why were you born when you were born? Why weren’t you born in 911, or 1215? Is it because some computer in the cosmos blipped and you came out now? I don’t buy that. I believe you were born in this dispensation, with the gospel of Jesus Christ on the earth today, because you were somebody before you got here. If you had any idea of who you were before you got here, the hair would stand up on the back of your neck. Joseph Smith said on one occasion, “If I were to tell you who I am, you’d slay me for blasphemy.” Wisely never told anybody who he was, but he knew.

On one occasion, President McKay, president of the Church, several years before his death, on a Sunday evening, didn’t have anything to do, so he took his wife, said “Let’s go to a fireside.” They went down to a stake center. There were lots of cars in the parking lot so he walks in and their stake president was speaking to a group of young people your age. Eight hundred of them. President McKay and his wife walked in. The stake president about swallowed his tie. Walked down to about the eighth row. He said, “Don’t get excited. I want to hear what you have to say.” The president continued with his talk. About halfway through his talk, he stopped and said, “You know, young people, I feel impressed to tell you that before the world was, before the world was, in that war in heaven, each of you in this room served as captains and generals in the Lord’s army.” And then he went on with his talk. It had nothing to do with what he was talking about. As he finished his talk, he looked down at President McKay and noticed President McKay was drilling him with his eyes. His heart stopped. He sat down and thought, “Boy, what have I said?” The closing prayer ended. He jumped up and he ran down to President McKay. Looked up to President McKay – everybody looked up to President McKay, he’s a great big guy – and he said, “You know, President McKay, I got a little carried away in my talk tonight. Did I say anything that was inappropriate?” He said, “No, you didn’t say anything that was inappropriate, you were just inaccurate.” “Well, what did I say?” He said, “There were no captains here tonight. They were all generals.” And he said, “Don’t you ever forget it.” And he turned around and walked out.

I have a testimony of that, brothers and sisters. If you were to know who you were before you got here, it would scare you. You know what that means? It means we don't have the right to do all the dumb stuff a lot of the other young people in the world are doing, fooling around with drugs and alcohol and premarital sex and all that dumb stuff. We don't have the right. Why? Because we know too much. Why? Because we're here because we were somebody before we came here and the Lord has sent us here to accomplish some great task. And that task is to take now and export the reality of the fact that the gospel has been restored. No one between 96 and 1820 could authoritatively say "Thus saith the Lord." Now we can. Why? Because there is a man on the planet today that can say "Thus saith the Lord' because I speak with him."

I want to bear my testimony to you, brothers and sisters, that that is a fact. That is a fact, and we have the opportunity of basking in that light. The priesthood of God is back on the earth, the same power by which the universe was created, and the only thing which limits our ability to exercise that power is the sanctity of our lives. May I plead with you to keep your lives right. Pure. Holy. Live up to the expectations that were sent with you when you got here. I bear that witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.