

Their Last Words

A Collection of the Final Teachings of Mormon Prophets

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Preface

And now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead. Amen. - Moroni 10:34ⁱ

A man's last words are as different from another's as they are unique. As the human life draws to an end, some choose to say a lot, and yet others choose to say nothing. The English language contains 171, 476 wordsⁱⁱ. To choose a few of them to share as your last dying statement is quite a fixture.

Each of the Lord's prophets has been called at a time unique to their service. Their responsibilities and duties, many of them applicable to *all* the Lord's prophets, have specific aspects of their prophetic leadership that are tailored to the needs of the flock they tend. Nearly every aspect of their creation is a lesson to those around them, continually living their lives in service to everyone they encounter. It is no wonder that even in their last dying moments, they choose to convey messages of a spiritual nature—bearing testimony of the one true and living God. Some of their statements are rather lengthy, and even so some are but a few words—yet all are powerful in their own way.

Joseph Smith, Jr.

The first prophet in this dispensation, the young Joseph Smith Jr., lived a life in service to his God. From the time that he was but a young boy, he sought earnestly to do the will of the Father. It is evident in that in the last days of the young prophets life, he was attuned to the spirit, and perhaps had foresight of the events to come.

In Franklin, Michigan, on the 16th of June 1844, the Prophet stood before a group of saints, in his last public discourse, and preached to them the divinity and unity of the Godhead. The prophet went on to bear strong testimony of God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost: “I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit, and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods. If this is in accordance with the New Testament, lo and behold! We have three Gods anyhow, and they are plural: and who can contradict it?”ⁱⁱⁱ

The prophet taught that in as much as the saints are concerned, “there is but one God.” Using the words of the biblical prophet Abraham, Joseph made clear the relationship between the Father and the Son.

June 23rd 1844, the prophet Joseph was brought to Carthage jail and one of his last teaching moments he said “I am going like a lamb to the slaughter; but I am calm as a summer's morning; I have a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward all men. I shall die innocent, and it shall yet be said of me — ‘he was murdered in cold blood’”.

Brigham Young

President Young’s final words in a public setting were delivered on the afternoon of August 19th 1877. A special conference was being held in Brigham City, Utah, as a new stake was being organized. President Young’s remarks in this speech were very direct and to-the-point. It was evident that he was speaking on the basis of correcting false doctrine and reproving the saints with the requisite amount of sharpness. The following are highlights from his discourse:

Speaking on the Sacrament “I would exhort my brethren and sisters to receive this ordinance every Sabbath, when they meet together, as is our practice; not following the

customs of others, for with some denominations this is administered once a month, with others once in three months, with others never, they not believing in outward ordinances. This is the way with the Christian sects; they teach that portion of the Bible which seemeth right unto them and add such doctrines, views and opinions as suit their own creeds.”

President Young went on to bear strong testimony of the importance of taking the sacrament each week; and doing it with a pure heart and a mind of contemplation on the sacred nature of the ordinance.

John Taylor

John Taylor was the third president of the Church in this dispensation. He lived in a time of great difficulty for the church as a whole and it’s members. Revelations given, prior to his service as Prophet of the Church, set a foundation of great turmoil and hardship. His commitment to the Gospel and his testimony of the restored truths were of great support to the members of the church at that time.

President Taylor spent the final years of his life living in exile. Sadly, this resulted in few people regularly hearing his teachings and wisdom during this time period. The last recorded public discourse by President Taylor was given February 1st 1885.

President Taylor’s final remarks in this discourse include answers to the rhetorical question “Are we suffering any wrongs?” He shares the following remarks: “Yes. Well, what would you do? I would do as I said some time ago. If you were out in a storm, pull up the collar of your coat and button yourself up, and keep the cold out until the storm blows past. This storm will blow past as others have done...”

He closes his speech with this statement: “...I have said before I say to-day, I tell you in the name of God, Woe! to them that fight against Zion, for God will fight against them. But let us be on the side of human liberty and human rights, and the protection of all correct principles and laws and government, and maintain every principle that is upright and virtuous and honorable, and let the world take the balance if they want, we don't want it. We will cleave to the truth, God being our helper, and try to introduce principles whereby the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And we will obey every institution of man for the Lord's sake so far as we can without violating our

consciences and doing things that are wrong and improper. God bless you and lead in the paths of life, in the name of Jesus. Amen.”

Wilford Woodruff

Wilford Woodruff is known for keeping very detailed journals—encompassing a very interesting part of the church’s early history. His journals have been the source of many fascinating stories and spiritual experiences during his lifetime, especially during his tenure as Prophet of the church.

President Woodruff was able to speak at an LDS Sacrament meeting in the San Francisco area on the 28th of August 1898. He died only 5 days later on the 2nd of September 1898. Sadly, the record of that discourse is not currently available. His last known public discourse, for which records exist, is his general conference talk, April 1989.

In this discourse President Woodruff spoke of a variety of gospel principles, bearing powerful testimony of them all. He shares an experience he had while in the town of Kirtland. Two other Apostles approached him and shared with him their desire for he to join them in their revolt against the Prophet Joseph. To which he said to them: “You are false. Joseph Smith has not apostatized. He holds the keys of the kingdom of God on earth, and will hold them until the coming of the Son of Man, whether in this world or in the world to come.’ I am happy to say that those men did repent pretty soon, turned to the Church, and died in it.”

It was in this General Conference talk that President Woodruff made public his experience with our founding fathers in the St. George temple. He related: “Brother Cannon has been laying before you something with regard to the nation in which we live and what has been said concerning it. I am going to bear my testimony to this assembly, if I never do it again in my life, that those men who laid the foundation of this American government and signed the Declaration of Independence were the best spirits the God of heaven could find on the face of the earth. They were choice spirits, not wicked men. General Washington and all the men that labored for the purpose were inspired of the Lord.“

“Another thing I am going to say here, because I have a right to say it. Every one of those men that signed the Declaration of Independence, with General Washington, called upon me, as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the Temple at St. George, two consecutive nights, and demanded at my hands that I should go forth and attend to the ordinances of the House of God for them.”

President Woodruff concluded his remarks by sharing something very profound: “I feel as though the day has come when every Elder and every Latter-day Saint ought to stop and consider the position he is in and the covenants he has entered into. Is their anything on the face of the earth that will pay you to depart from the oracles of God and from the Gospel of Christ? Is there anything that will pay you to lose the principles of salvation, to lose a part in the first resurrection with the privilege of standing in the morning of the resurrection clothed with glory, immortality and eternal life at the head of your father's house? No, there is nothing.”

“Let us try to live our religion, do our duty, and magnify our calling while we are here. The eyes of all heaven are over us. The eyes of the world are over us. The eyes of the angels are over us. The Lord has looked upon us and upon the house of Israel to be saviors of the nations. We are here to fulfill these principles...Do not neglect this! God Bless you. Amen.”

Lorenzo Snow

President Lorenzo Snow's final public discourse was given in the October conference of the church, 1901. The talk, short in length, was the only words he offered at the conference and died five days later. President Snow offered council to the church as a whole, but in large part he was speaking to the holders of the high priesthood. President Snow: “I want to say a few words in reference to one particular subject. and I do not want what I shall say to be forgotten...This Church is now nearly seventy two years of age, and we are not expected to do the work of the days of our youth, but to do greater, larger and more extensive work. The Lord is coming one of these days, and He is interested in the work that you ought to be doing, and anxious to be doing. You ought to do all that you possibly, can, and leave everything in your business affairs that you wisely can do and attend to these matters. The presidents of these fifty Stakes should consider the people in their respective Stakes, in their various dominions. They should regard them as

their own family, as their sons and daughters; and take as deep an interest in them as they ought to take in their own wives and children. It should be their thought by day and by night, how and in what way they can be most serviceable to their respective charges. Oh! brethren, do remember these things that I am now talking about; do not forget them.”

President Snow evidently had a strong testimony of the church as a family. In this we see that it was one of his dying wishes that those called to watch over the flocks would see to it that the flock is getting along in all respects, spiritually and physically.

Joseph F. Smith

President Joseph F. Smith had several opportunities to offer testimony and council to those he conferred with in the final days of his life. November 10th, 1918 President Smith, in a meeting with his children, gave some special teachings—they would be some of his last.

“If there is anything on earth I have tried to do as much as anything else, it is to keep my word, my promises, my integrity, to do what it was my duty to do.” President Smith went on to bear testimony of the importance of family, and to express his overwhelming gratitude and love for his family. “I want to say to my children that my body isn't what I would like it to be; if you could look right down into my heart you would find that my head and my heart are just as good as they ever were, and just as firm and faithful as they ever were in the world.” His final words to his children: “May the Lord bless you.”

In the moments immediately before he passed, taking the hand of Heber J. Grant, President Smith said “The Lord bless you, my boy, the Lord bless you; you have got a great responsibility. Always remember this is the Lord's work and not man's. The Lord is greater than any man. He knows whom he wants to lead His Church, and never makes any mistake. The Lord bless you.”

It's evident that Joseph F. Smith had a strong desire for the Lord to continue to bless those who have come to rely on him. Certainly his family, but Brother Grant as well—for he would become the next president of the church.

Heber J. Grant

Heber J. Grant made his last teachings by proxy at the April 1945 General Conference of the Church. The practice of another person reading the remarks of one of the brethren too ill to speak personally became common practice during this time period, as this was the case with this particular talk.

President Grant starts out his remarks with very sincere complements to the leadership of the church. He says: “I rejoice in the integrity, the faith, and the diligence of those who preside in the various stakes of Zion. I realize that we are beset with faults and failings and imperfections, but I am convinced that almost without exception those who have the charge of the Saints in the wards and stakes of Zion, and in the missions are men of God, and that their integrity is beyond question, and that, if need be, they would be ready and willing to lay down their lives for the advancement of the kingdom of God. I believe that the elders of Israel in all the different wards and stakes of Zion earnestly desire to know the mind and will of our Heavenly Father, and that they are ready and willing to do anything that is within their power, to fulfill that mind and that will and to carry it out in their lives. It is this integrity and this desire that give me joy and satisfaction, and that encourage me in the responsibilities that devolve upon me.”

He goes on to teach that the law of tithing is ever important, and that the saints of the church should feel grateful to “fulfill their financial obligation to the Lord.”

President Grant ends his remarks bearing testimony of the truthfulness of the restored gospel. Citing the Prophet Joseph's first vision, he says “[it was] the most glorious thing that has ever happened” since the time and ministry of the Savior. He ends with powerful and loving testimony: “I bear witness to you that I do know that God lives, that he hears and answers prayer; that Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer of the world; that Joseph Smith was and is a prophet of the true and living God; and that Brigham Young and those who have succeeded him were, and are, likewise prophets of God. I do not have the language at my command to express the gratitude to God for this knowledge that I possess. Time and time again my heart has been melted, my eyes have wept tears of gratitude for the knowledge that he lives and that this gospel called Mormonism is in very deed the plan of life and salvation, that it is in very deed the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That God may help you and me and everyone to live it, and that he may help those

who know not the truth, that they may receive this witness, is my constant and earnest prayer, and I ask it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

George Albert Smith

President George Albert Smith passed away just one day before the annual general conference of 1951. His last recorded words were noted by his daughter Edith Elliot: “She told me that, on the very last day of President Smith’s life, the family had gathered around his bedside. He was breathing more deeply, and they were concerned. The doctor stepped aside, letting the family draw close. The eldest son leaned over, and he said, ‘Father, is there something you’d like to say to the family—something special?’ “Then she went on to describe this great prophet, with a smile on his lips, saying, ‘Yes, only this: I know that my Redeemer liveth; I know that my Redeemer liveth’ ”

David O. McKay

David O. McKay’s final address to the body of the church was delivered October 5th 1969. Due to President McKay’s failing health, the last few years of his life, most of his talks were read by one of his sons. Robert R. McKay, a son, read this final discourse.

“Spirituality is the consciousness of victory over self, the consciousness of being above the passions, whether in anger or jealousy, or envy, or hatred” said President McKay. His closing remarks at this conference alluded to the, then unknown fact, that this would be his last general conference. President McKay spoke on a myriad of different things, making frequent reference to his testimony of the restoration of the gospel.

He taught an interesting concept while quoting John 21:15, ““Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? ". . . Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee . . . " And Jesus answered, "Feed my lambs. " President McKay went on to show that *love* comes before *feeding*. Before feeding or teaching the lambs of the Lord, we must first love them.

President McKay closed his remarks with the following words: “I bear you my testimony that the head of this Church is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the Redeemer of the world. I know of the reality of his existence, of his willingness to guide

and direct all who serve him. I know that in this dispensation he restored with his Father, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the gospel of Jesus Christ in its fullness. I know that one of the glorious messages given by Christ, our Redeemer, is that the spirit of man passes triumphantly through the portals of death into everlasting life. To him, this earthly career is but a day and its closing but the setting of life's sun; death but a sleep, followed by a glorious awakening in the morning of an eternal realm. May God bless you all, and may he guide and help you that righteousness, harmony, and love for one another may dwell in each home, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Joseph Fielding Smith

Joseph Fielding Smith’s last teachings to the church are unique in that they were offered in the opening of the general conference preceding his death, as opposed to the closing remarks typically seen in past Prophets.

President Smith’s remarks include frequent references to not just *his* desires but the desires of the first presidency and the quorum of the twelve Apostles. He says: “And there is no cure for the ills of the world except the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our hope for peace, for temporal and spiritual prosperity, and for an eventual inheritance in the kingdom of God is found only in and through the restored gospel. There is no work that any of us can engage in that is as important as preaching the gospel and building up the Church and kingdom of God on earth. And so we invite all our Father’s children, everywhere, to believe in Christ, to receive him as he is revealed by living prophets, and to join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We call upon the world to repent, to worship that God who made them, and to believe the words of those whom he hath sent in this day to proclaim his gospel.”

To the honest in heart in all nations we say: The Lord loves you. He wants you to receive the full blessings of the gospel. He is now inviting you to believe the Book of Mormon, to accept Joseph Smith as a prophet, and to come into his earthly kingdom and thereby become heirs of eternal life in his heavenly kingdom. “

To those who have received the gospel we say: Keep the commandments. Walk in the light. Endure to the end. Be true to every covenant and obligation, and the Lord will bless you beyond your fondest dreams. As it was said by one of old: “Let us hear the

conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” (Eccl. 12:13.)

To all the families in Israel we say: The family is the most important organization in time or in eternity. Our purpose in life is to create for ourselves eternal family units. There is nothing that will ever come into your family life that is as important as the sealing blessings of the temple and then keeping the covenants made in connection with this order of celestial marriage. “

To parents in the Church we say: Love each other with all your hearts. Keep the moral law and live the gospel. Bring up your children in light and truth; teach them the saving truths of the gospel; and make your home a heaven on earth, a place where the Spirit of the Lord may dwell and where righteousness may be enthroned in the heart of each member.”

Harold B. Lee

President Harold B. Lee’s last remarks were offered in the months preceding his death. They were given in the month of June, 1973—though not published church-wide until November of that same year; one month before his death. In a talk entitled “Divinely Inspired” President Lee was addressing an audience of priesthood holders, both Aaronic and Melchizedek.

His words in this sermon show how he viewed the priesthood. He called it the priesthood of love.

“We have said again and again, and I repeat it now, that the most important work we will ever do will be within the walls of our own homes. Give the child love in the home, and the home will give our auxiliaries well-adjusted children who can feel the lessons of love of God and man taught in the Church.”

The experience of love in one’s early youth enables him to develop the ability to feel within the feelings the urges that create the attitudes that result in a truly religious life. It is these feelings that supply the motivation for good works.”

He closed his remarks with an admonition to the priesthood leaders of the church to go and share these “[messages] of love.”

Spencer W. Kimball

Like many before him, President Kimball's health started to fail him several years prior to his death. His final words to the world were published in the *Ensign*, less than a month before his passing. Though the words were actually written many years prior, he felt it prudent for them to be reprinted at the given time.

The article, entitled *The Abundant Life*, shows that it is in keeping and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ that we find life in its most abundant sense. President Kimball: "Jesus of Nazareth came into the world to bring to pass the Atonement, which gives to all men everywhere immortality through the gift of resurrection. Thus Jesus' teachings can clearly help us to live a righteous life and to be happier here, but his great sacrifice guarantees to us immortality and the extension of our individual identity and life beyond the grave. Of course, there are those who do not accept the reality of the Resurrection—and that is their privilege and their loss—but it is impossible to speak of the abundant life without speaking of life as a continuum. This life, this narrow sphere we call mortality, does not, within the short space of time we are allowed here, give to all of us perfect justice, perfect health, or perfect opportunities. Perfect justice, however, will come eventually through a divine plan, as will the perfection of all other conditions and blessings—to those who have lived to merit them."

He closes with powerful words: "The more we are guided by eternal considerations in our conduct, the better we will manage mortality. The more we understand Jesus' teachings concerning the purpose of life, the greater will be our sense of belonging and our sense of identity. The more we come to accept the Fatherhood of God, the better able we will be to implement the brotherhood of man. The more we understand what really happened in the life of Jesus of Nazareth in Gethsemane and on Calvary, the better able we will be to understand the importance of sacrifice and selflessness in our lives."

Ezra Taft Benson

President Benson's last remarks were read by President Monson (then the second councilor in the first presidency) in the semi-annual general conference preceding his

death. The talk he called “To the Elderly in the Church” showed the human side of the Lord’s prophet. President Benson made several references to the deep and special feelings he holds for the elderly of the church, and in a humorous way, cited that it was because that was the demographic he fit in.

President Benson suggested eight ways in which the elderly can make their last years the most productive; they are as follows: 1. Work in the temple and attend often, 2. Collect and write family histories, 3. Become involved in missionary service, 4. Provide leadership by building family togetherness, 5. Accept and fulfill church callings, 6. Plan for your financial future, 7. Render Christ-like service, 8. Stay physically fit, healthy and active.

May I suggest that President Benson’s remarks, though given to the elderly, are universally applicable for everyone in all stages of life. His closing words: “I leave you my testimony of the joy of living—of the joys of *full* gospel living and of going through the Refiner’s fire and the sanctification process that takes place. As the Apostle Paul so well said, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.” (Rom. 8:28.)

I leave my blessing upon you. The Savior lives. This is His church. The work is true, and in the words of our Lord and Savior, “Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life” (3 Ne. 15:9), to which I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”

Howard W. Hunter

President Howard W. Hunter’s last remarks were in a setting that is completely unique to him—as his last public speech was at the First Presidency Christmas devotional. The final words of his talk were the most moving to me: “I testify that as we follow the Savior with full purpose of heart, His promise to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well will be fulfilled in our own lives: “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13–14).

May we find our spiritual thirst quenched by the living water of the Savior. May He become our focal point at this Christmas season and always. I testify that He lives today, the babe of Bethlehem—now the risen Lord. He and His Eternal Father love and care for each of us in a sacred and personal way.”

As His special witness, I extend my love to you this evening and to all of our Heavenly Father’s children wherever they may be. My wish for you is a happy, joyous Christmas. May this season bring to you and yours the rich blessings of the gospel of the Savior, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”

Gordon B. Hinckley

President Hinckley’s closing remarks are unique to me, because they were the inspiration for this particular project. I remember listening to his final words and having the distinct impression that this would be the last time he would speak to me. It made his words even more special. They are as follows:

“My beloved brothers and sisters, we now conclude a great conference. We have been edified, uplifted. We have been inspired and lifted to a higher appreciation of this wonderful gospel. The music, the spoken word, and the prayers have all been magnificent. We now return to our homes. If we are driving, let us be careful. Let no tragedy mar the experience we have enjoyed.

“All of the proceedings of this conference will appear in a subsequent issue of the *Ensign* and *Liahona*. We encourage you again to read the talks in your family home evenings and discuss them together as families. They are the products of much prayer and meditation and are well worthy of careful consideration.

“Now the conference is adjourned for six months. We look forward to seeing you again next April. I’m 97, but I hope I’m going to make it. May the blessings of heaven attend you in the meantime is our humble and sincere prayer in the name of our Redeemer, even the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.”

Though these words were his last council to the body of the church, might I suggest that his last teaching was in his last act, not his last words. President Hinckley’s final public appearance was at the rededication of the Utah State Capitol on January 4th 2008. It was an act of service, to his fellow man that will be one of his living testaments.

ⁱ (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1981)

ⁱⁱ (Oxford University Press, 2012)

ⁱⁱⁱ (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1946)

Other references available upon request.