Come Follow Me Podcast
Elo Viz Production
Week 3
JSH 1:1-26

As I was looking at this account of the first vision this week I found it interesting how much focus is on or around Joseph Smith. If I were to describe it with a visual image It is like a target. You know the ones that have the multiple rings and they all get smaller and smaller until you get to the bullseye in the middle. Each ring represents a principle of the gospel. For example: There is a ring of Tithing, another one for the word of wisdom, there could be another one for Youth programs, and still another for the Relief society. I'm sure there might be a ring for President Nelson, And possibly a ring for every prophet that has ever lived since the dispensation of the fullness of times. There certainly must be a ring for the Prophet Joseph Smith. Each ring is a step or a principle we must wrestle with in order to build our testimonies. And they all are in a different order for each of us. But one thing is always in the center, or at least He should be. The bullseye should always be Jesus Christ. All the rest seem to fall in different orders for each person. But what I find to be interesting is that the one for Joseph Smith a lot of the time seems to usually be on the very outside of the target. Right on the edge where it usually gets attacked by outside forces.

What I mean by that is that Joseph Smith is a huge stumbling block for a lot of people inside and outside the church. Just to get onto the target. Before they can deal with all the other things in the church, they must come to grips with this flawed man and what he has or hasn't done for the restoration of the gospel. Many inside and outside the church have harsh feelings towards him, some have factual basis. Others build their judgments of him upon lies. But there's one thing we can all agree on: Joseph Smith was not a perfect man.

Many try to hold him to a very high standard, many also hold president Nelson to a very high standard. It is almost as if we have tiers or levels and the prophets are just one step down from the Savior of the world. Then below the prophets we have apostles, then local leaders, and so on. But here is a little secret That I hope will open your eyes. There are no tiers, no levels, no pedestals that exist for any mortal man or women. There are only 2 types of mortals, Jesus Christ who lived a perfect sinless life and the rest of us. That's it, nothing more and nothing less.

It drives me absolutely crazy when I see people almost worshiping the prophets. It's the worst I have ever seen with president Nelson. Please don't misunderstand: President Nelson is a good man that has served our Lord and Savior well in his life. But, that does not make him a God or worthy of worship. We could say the same about Joseph Smith. He did some amazing things in his life, but that doesn't make him worthy of worship, nor does it make him worthy of your condemnation. And if we find ourselves in this mode of judgement please please remember what Jesus taught in 3rd Nephi 14:2:

“**2** For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

Jesus was and is the only being that ever lived on this earth that was Godly.

When speaking of the sermon on the mount and the perfectionism that exists in the church President Holland said this:

"I believe that Jesus did not intend His sermon on this subject to be a verbal hammer for battering us about our shortcomings [or the shortcomings of others]. No, I believe He intended it to be a tribute to who and what God the Eternal Father is and what we can achieve with Him in eternity. In any case, I am grateful to know that in spite of *my* imperfections, at least God is perfect—that at least He is, for example, able to love His enemies, because too often, due to the "natural man" and woman in us, you and I are sometimes that enemy. How grateful I am that at least God can bless those who despitefully use Him because, without wanting or intending to do so, we *all* despitefully use Him sometimes. I am grateful that God is merciful and a peacemaker because I need mercy and the world needs peace. Of course, all we say of the Father's virtues we also say of His Only Begotten Son, who lived and died unto the same perfection.

I hasten to say that focusing on the Father's and the Son's achievements rather than our failures does not give us one ounce of justification for undisciplined lives or dumbing down our standards. I am simply suggesting that at least one purpose of a scripture or a commandment can be to remind us just how magnificent "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" really is, inspiring in us greater love and admiration for Him and a greater desire to be like Him.

My brothers and sisters, except for Jesus, there have been no flawless performances on this earthly journey we are pursuing, so while in mortality let's strive for steady improvement without obsessing over what behavioral scientists call "toxic perfectionism." We should avoid that latter excessive expectation of ourselves and of others"

https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2017/10/be-ye-therefore-perfect-eventually?lang=eng

With that in mind let's look at some interesting verses in this account of Joseph Smith.

In verse 15 we read about what happened when Joseph knelt down to pray in the sacred grove, which it is important to note at this point the grove had not yet become sacred. It reads:

"I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so

that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction."

This is something we rarely focus on in this account. But I feel that it is important. Why did this happen? Why would the prince of darkness try to destroy this 14 year old boy? And after this experience did the adversary give up on tempting him?

There are the obvious answers that Joseph had a very important work to do and the devil did not want the restoration to happen. But why did this specific thing happen? Why did he seize upon him and bind his tongue, why did he make him feel as if he would be destroyed?

Well, I'll share with you what I believe about it. Something incredible was about to bless Joseph's life. But in order for that to happen there had to be an opposite trial or temptation that gives balance to the universe. Look at Job for example. He was a very wealthy man, but more importantly he was a very faithful man. God wanted to bless him with more than what he had, a lot more. But in order for that to happen God had to take away everything that Job had, some of his family, his wealth, his health. God knew that Job was going to be faithful and when he was he received so much more than he couldn't possibly have dreamed of. Same with Joseph Smith. God had some great visions and blessings for Joseph, in order for those things to take place the adversary had to give him an equal portion of trial or pain.

And if you are saying to yourself: That hasn't happened to me. Well, then…buckle up! I heard a wise man once say: When I receive a trial or hardship, when I am faced with a huge temptation or a long moment of sorrow, my heart rejoices because I know God is preparing something great for me. Some great new nugget of knowledge, a temporal blessing, or even an eternal one. He is a God of grace and mercy and His ways are always just.

Mormoni put it this way, this is in Ether 12:6:
"**6** And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith."

This mindset, this faith filled principle sure does help us understand what is going on when a trial hits you square between the eyes. Somehow it makes everything more clear. For me it helps me to shack the darts of the adversary by focusing on the reason for the moment. And though perhaps I may not have the privilege of being visited by angels or seeing those majestic beings standing in a pillar of light, I can know now just as if that would have happened that Jesus is the Christ, That God the Eternal Father is involved in every aspect of our lives. That He sits at the refiner's fire and watches patiently for the development of our souls. Might we trust that no matter what happens, He is keenly aware of you and your needs.

Of this great truth I testify, In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.