Talk for Sunday: Following the Prophet

Good morning brothers and sisters. Amid the many philosophies of men and competing notions of truth and morality, amid the great confusion in our day about many subjects, I believe it to be a great act mercy on the part of Heavenly Father that, as part of an established pattern, He has today, as He has always done throughout time, provide His children with a person of refined character, someone He has prepared and tried and eventually called to act as a mouth-piece for His will for all of us, to guide us here in our probationary states. Such a man as this is a prophet and provides the rest of us with access to revealed truth and direction for our day that we would otherwise not have. Is it any wonder then the importance of following a modern prophet?

Let us take a moment to consider this question in the context of the days of the ancient prophet Noah. Of this, Ezra Taft Benson said, “Always the words of the living prophet took precedence, for it was God’s message to the people at that particular time. Had any man accepted the ancient scripture in the days of Noah but refused to follow the revelation that Noah received and failed to board the ark, he would have been drowned.” (1) President Benson then goes on to explain that while the people in Noah’s day were being warned by a prophet to prepare for a cleansing of the earth by water, that we, in our day, are being warned by prophets to prepare for the next cleansing of the earth, this time by fire.

It’s worth noting that President Benson placed as much, if not more emphasis on following the Lord as on following the prophet. Indeed, these two things are related. He said, “Always the words of the living prophets are of the most vital concern to the people; and always, if a man would know of Christ and learn his commandments so that he can obey them, he must seek to find his authorized representatives.”

In seeking the Lord’s authorized representatives, the Lord himself gave us a test whereby we may discern between such representatives and those who are merely imposters. In Matt. 7 he said, “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

The words of the prophets are clearly a kind of fruit that we can put to the test. Recall Alma comparing the word to a seed that, if we cultivated in our hearts, would produce swelling motions within us. I believe these motions are witnesses of truth from the Holy Ghost that the word is true. While there are many different fruits of the prophets and their works, I can think of no greater than a witness from the Holy Ghost.

It’s important to point out that heeding the council of living prophets and apostles will not only improve our outcome in the next life, but will lead to happiness in our lives here and now. Looking back on my own life, I distinctly recall specific councils given from the pulpit at general conference from the prophet that I failed to follow, and I can see a great deal of heartache and sorrow that could have been avoided, and blessings that could have been retained, had I heeded the prophet’s instruction.

Interestingly, a great example of heeding the prophet’s council came to mind from this past general conference from the very man who has become the next president of the church. In President Nelson’s talk he said, “Remember in the Sunday morning session of the April 2017 general conference, President Thomas S. Monson pleaded with ‘each of us to prayerfully study and ponder the Book of Mormon each day.’ Many have responded to our prophet’s plea.” (2) I’m ashamed to admit that I did not respond to this plea, let alone remember it; but being a man who always wants to follow the direction and council of the prophet, President Nelson took so well President Monson’s council to heart that at the end of his talk, he produced, from his personal study of the Book of Mormon, comprehensive lists of what the book is, what it affirms, refutes, fulfils, clarifies and reveals.

Following President Nelson’s example, we should never take lightly any council coming from the prophet; bur rather, we should immediately put that council into practice. A desire to be blessed in doing so, or doing so because we see the benefit, is not bad, but might I suggest that a desire to be obedient to the commandments of God, as given through his authorized representative, to be a greater motive. In 1 Sam. 15:22 we read, “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” The Lord requires our obedience and our faith; and interestingly, these go hand in hand. It requires faith to be obedient, and obedience is an act of faith.

While instructing and empowering His twelve apostles, the Lord said in Matt. 10:40, “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.” Reflecting upon these words, we should consider how well each of us receives council from the prophet. The Book of Mormon gives two interesting and juxtaposing examples of reception from a prophet of God; namely, that of Nephi and his two brothers Lamen and Lemual as concerning the council given by their father Lehi. Do we, like Nephi, when hearing from the prophet what we may not immediately understand, such as Lehi’s vision of the tree of life, move forward with faith that may lead to testimony; or do we, like Lamen and Lemual harden our hearts and swim in doubt? Furthermore, how might we respond to a call from the prophet to repent of any particular sin?

Similar to following the prophet, we must also sustain the prophet. Shortly after Howard W. Hunter became the new prophet, Elder L. Tom Perry said, “Today, by sustaining a new prophet, we have placed ourselves under solemn covenant to heed his voice.” When Thomas S. Monson became the prophet, President Henry B. Eyring said, “For us to sustain those who have been called today, we must examine our lives, repent as necessary, pledge to keep the Lord’s commandments, and follow His servants. The Lord warns us that if we do not do those things, the Holy Ghost will be withdrawn, we will lose the light which we have received, and we will not be able to keep the pledge we have made today to sustain the Lord’s servants in His true Church.”

On the topic of sustaining the prophet, I found it interesting to read about the transition of church leadership from Joseph Smith to Brigham Young. After a very long speech by Sidney Rigdon on why he thought he should succeed Joseph Smith, Brigham Young gave a short talk in which the audience, if it were not for his appearance, but in terms of his voice, could not distinguish him from that of the late prophet Joseph Smith. This was a miracle and testimony to those listening that what he was saying was true. After Joseph’s passing, it was the apostles who held the keys and authority to lead the church. Perhaps if we listen carefully enough to the words of our new prophet, President Nelson, we may be able to hear the voices of some of our favorite prophets who have passed on, but more importantly, the voice of the Lord.

Just as the prophet is entitled to revelation by the spirit of prophecy and revelation in directing the church, we, through our faithfulness, humility and obedience to the commandments, may be entitled to personal revelation for ourselves and our families by the same spirit. It is not our place, however, to contradict the council given to us by the prophet. L. Tom Perry has said, “Repeatedly the scriptures declare that the Lord gives His commandments to the children of men through living prophets. No committee, assembly, or any other authority has the right to dictate to Him doctrine that is contrary to His law. God’s eternal blessings are contingent upon our obedience and adherence to the word of the law that is revealed through His holy prophets.”

Dear brothers and sisters, I am so very thankful for Heavenly Father’s gift of His divine son Jesus Christ who came to earth and led a perfect life and atoned for our sins. I am also thankful for Heavenly Father’s gift of righteous men He has prepared to be prophets who have come to earth in ancient and modern times to help point us to the Savior. I am thankful for the life that President Monson has lived. I sustain the new prophet, President Nelson, and am thankful for the life that he has lived thus far. I know that our prophet holds the keys and authority to administrate the Lord’s church, and that he is entitled to receive revelation from the Lord for the church on our behalf. I bear witness to each of you that while in the MTC the Holy Ghost has born witness to me that Joseph Smith was indeed a true and living prophet. An incredible fruit of Joseph Smith is the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. May we all strive to follow the council of the prophet that we may bring forth our own good fruit. In so doing, we become the light of the world. As the Lord said in Matt. 5, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

**References:**

1. “Listen to a Prophet’s Voice,” Elder Ezra Taft Benson, January 1973.
2. “The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be without It?” President Russel M. Nelson, October 2017 General Conference.
3. “Lessons from the Old Testament,” Elder David F. Evans, June 2006.
4. “By their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them,” Dean L. Larson, October 1985.
5. “Heed the Prophet’s Voice,” L. Tom Perry, October 1994.
6. “Blessings of Following Prophets, L. Tom Perry, LDS Media Library.
7. “The True and Living Church,” President Henry B. Eyring, April 2008.
8. “Brigham Young Leads the Church,” Lesson 38, Primary 5: D&C and Church History.