

## Joseph Smith (KS3 & KS4)

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In 2020 Latter-day Saints celebrate the 200th anniversary of the First Vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Who was this man? Firstly, it is important to note who he was not- he is not our Saviour, nor is he an object of our worship. I'm sure if he were here today, he would want us to focus on the life and teachings of his and our Master- Jesus Christ, but through Joseph Smith we learn many things about our Saviour.

So, who was Joseph Smith?

### 1. He was a man

As we look at the life of Joseph, we see he had many human qualities that were to be admire. Often, we look at the Saviour and think how hard an example he is to live up to, but Joseph Smith- mere mortal that he was gave us an example of how we can follow the Saviour even with our limitations and imperfections. There are many stories from Joseph's life that help us understand his 'human qualities'.

I like to use an example from his life as I strive to remain steadfast in my faith. When he was challenged about his experiences, and in particular the First Vision (see below) he recorded:

*I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart: Why persecute me for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision; and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation (Joseph Smith History 1:25).*

### 2. He was a Prophet.

Some may have a tendency to emphasize his human qualities and perhaps give them an excuse to dismiss some of the teachings of the Saviour which Joseph taught. Above all the important fact of Joseph's life is that he was a prophet of God. We know his standing as a Prophet of God when we read D&C 135:3:

*In the short space of twenty years, he has brought forth the Book of Mormon, which he translated by the gift and power of God, and has been the means of publishing it on two continents; has sent the fulness of the everlasting gospel, which it contained, to the four quarters of the earth; has brought forth the revelations and commandments which compose this book of Doctrine and Covenants, and many other wise documents and instructions for the benefit of the children of men; gathered many thousands of the Latter-day Saints, founded a great city, and left a fame and name that cannot be slain. He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; and like most of the Lord's anointed in ancient times, has sealed his mission and his works with his own blood; and so has his brother Hyrum. In life they were not divided, and in death they were not separated!*

A prophet is someone who teaches of Jesus Christ and warns the world as the mouthpiece of God. This began nearly 200 years ago in the Sacred Grove. On seeking for truth Joseph reached the conclusion that he needed to pray and ask God where his truth lay. Following this determination in the early spring of 1820 he retired to a grove of trees and received what is now termed, The First Vision:

*After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, 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.*

*But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.*

*It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him! (JSH 1:15-17).*

In this event Joseph saw the Father and the Son, and also received a promise that at some future point the Church would be restored through him. There were many things that Joseph revealed and restored under the direction of the Godhead. He translated the Book of Mormon, received the priesthood under the hands of Peter, James and John, and organised the Church on April 6, 1830.

### 3. He was a teacher.

This is linked with Joseph being a prophet. A prophet is a teacher. His subject is Christ and the plan of salvation. Through Joseph we have greater understanding of the plan of salvation. How wonderful it is to read of the teaching experiences of the Prophet Joseph. Following the death of a friend he was asked to deliver a funeral sermon; in this he taught the doctrine of baptism for the dead which excited his audience so much that they left the meeting to run to the river and start straight away.

Joseph wasn't born a teacher- though he was foreordained so to be. He developed as all of us do- line upon line, here a little and there a little. It is this same unlettered boy who first saw Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ that delivered great sermons years later.

### 4. He was a revealer of truth.

This began with Joseph's search for truth in his early years. He learnt how to seek revelation and recognize the promptings of the Spirit. This began early in his life; when searching for truth and coming to the conclusion he must ask God he was first of all reading the Bible:

*I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. **Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again,** knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know; (JSH 1:11-12 emphasis added).*

This passage highlights how the process of revelation happens through the Holy Spirit. He works in our minds and in our hearts. It strengthens me to know that this personal revelation is available to all of us, including me. Joseph once taught that “God hath not revealed any thing to Joseph, but what he will make known unto the Twelve & even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to—bear them.”

As a Latter-day Saint I believe that knowledge and clarification of great truths were revealed through the Prophet Joseph including:

- The nature of God
- The Plan of Salvation
- The priesthood of God
- The apostasy and restoration
- Book of Mormon
- Word of Wisdom
- Temple work

5. He was a martyr.

Joseph sealed his testimony with his blood- in June 1844 he was shot by a mob while being held in Carthage Jail. Joseph once declared:

"I am tired. I have been mobbed, I have suffered so much from outsiders and from my own family... I have to seal my testimony to this generation with my blood. I have to do it for this work will never progress until I am gone for the testimony is of no force until the testator is dead. People little know who I am when they talk about me, and they never will know until they see me weighed in the balance in the Kingdom of God. Then they will know who I am, and see me as I am."

I was once on holiday in Cornwall and saw the following dedication on a war memorial; to me it sums up the mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith in teaching me of my Saviour and through him, my eternal destiny:

*In proud and grateful memory of the men... who gave their all and in giving raised men's ideals of what man may become.*

This resource was written by James Holt, one of RE:ONLINE's Email a Believer team. If your class would like to ask a Latter-day Saint representative any questions about their beliefs, or to see answers to previously asked questions please visit <http://pof.reonline.org.uk/people-of-faith/latter-day-saints/>