
Stay the Course

D&C 39

Three days after the third conference of the Church held at the Peter Whitmer Sr. Log Home in Fayette, New York, the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation directed to James Covill, a minister and preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In that January 5, 1831, revelation James was told, “I have looked upon thy works and I know thee” (D&C 39:7). He was further told, “Thine heart is now right before me at this time; and, behold I have bestowed great blessings upon thy head” (v. 8).

James was admonished to “arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on my name, and you shall receive my Spirit, and a blessing so great as you never have known” (D&C 39:10). For so doing, the Lord also told James, “I have prepared thee for a greater work. Thou shall preach the fulness of my gospel, which I have sent forth in these last days, the covenant which I have sent forth to recover my people, which are of the house of Israel” (v. 11). James was called to go to Ohio and cry with a loud voice saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand; crying: Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God” (v. 19).

With a revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, James had sure knowledge that the Lord knew him and great blessings were in store. In following the admonition given to “arise and be baptized,” it is believed that James entered baptismal waters and made a covenant with God (D&C 40:1). Yet he did not continue as he commenced. The “cares of the world caused him to reject the word” (v. 2).

It takes courage to choose the right and stay the course. President Brigham Young likened staying the course to an old ship: “We are on the old ship Zion. . . . [God] is at the helm and will stay there. . . . He dictates, guides and directs. If the people will have

implicit confidence in their God, never forsake their covenants nor their God, He will guide us right.”¹

Elder M. Russell Ballard spoke of the “Old Ship Zion” at the October 2015 general conference and said,

Clearly, our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ have outfitted the Old Ship Zion with clear and simple eternal truths that will help us stay the course through the troubled waters of mortal life. Here are just a few.

The Church of Jesus Christ has always been led by living prophets and apostles. Though mortal and subject to human imperfection, the Lord’s servants are inspired to help us avoid obstacles that are spiritually life threatening and to help us pass safely through mortality to our final, ultimate, heavenly destination.

During my nearly 40 years of close association, I have been a personal witness as both quiet inspiration and profound revelation have moved to action the prophets and apostles, the other General Authorities, and the auxiliary leaders. While neither perfect nor infallible, these good men and women have been perfectly dedicated to leading the work of the Lord forward as He has directed.

And make no mistake about it: the Lord directs His Church through living prophets and apostles. This is the way He has always done His work. Indeed, the Savior taught, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me” (John 13:20).²

Although James Covell was well-versed in the scriptures and had dedicated his life to preaching about the Savior, His teachings, His ministry, His suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, His death on the cross, and the empty tomb, when it came to keeping a covenant with God, he failed to stay the course.

¹ Brigham Young, “Remarks,” *Deseret News*, November 18, 1857, 291.

² M. Russell Ballard, “Old Ship Zion,” *Ensign*, November 2015.