

8th Address to Christians

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I want to talk about religion—but I don't want this topic to be what it usually is, and that's a source of unease and friction and conflict and debate and discomfort and—I mean, religion is one of those things where we find it really easy to do two completely contradictory things: love religion—because we want to be close with God—and take offense at our neighbor—because their religious views differ somewhat from our own when, in fact, the Author of the religion is telling us all to love one another. If we've got Christ in common, we ought to be able to de-emphasize our dissimilarities and emphasize our similarities to find peace in Him.

If you study the events that occurred following the New Testament—that immediate generation following the New Testament; you can see it in the book of Acts; you can see it in the letters of the New Testament—Christ commissioned twelve apostles, and He sent them out with a message to bear about Him. But Christianity, in the immediate aftermath of Christ's life, had various kinds of Christianity. We had a Matthean Christianity that was based upon the teachings of Matthew. We had a Pauline Christianity that was based upon the teachings of Paul. We had a Petrine Christianity, and it was based upon the teachings of Peter. (It was the Petrine version of Christianity that ultimately got the broadest sweep that resulted in the formation of the Catholic Church.) But Christianity did not start out centralized. It started out “diffused.” It's almost as if what Christ wanted to do was to get the word out and let everyone have in common some very basic things, in which we could find peace and love and harmony with one another—but outside of that, to explore, perhaps, the depths of what the message could be and not to have it insular, rigid, and one-size-fits-all.

We had during that very earliest period—

You had obviously-commissioned companions that had walked with Jesus, had been witnesses of His teachings. He had brought them aboard; they had heard the Sermon on the Mount; they had witnessed miracles. John (in his gospel) makes it clear that they weren't really up-to-speed with what Christ was doing and what He was about because He would say things, and they wouldn't understand Him. From John's gospel, what happened was: it was retrospective; it was post-resurrection. When they knew—now—that Christ was going to come, He was gonna die, and He was gonna be resurrected, and then He was gonna ascend into heaven to be in a position of glory, that they looked back retrospectively and they say, “Ok, now I get it. Now I understand what He was talking about. Now those statements about the necessity that He suffer come full circle, and we get it.” But walking with Him during this time period, they were really not tuned in to comprehending what the Savior was intending to do and, ultimately, would do.

Then after all that, we've got this guy who is a persecutor of the Christians and an opponent of Christianity who—on his way with a commission to try and bring Christians to justice—on the road to Damascus, gets interrupted in what he's doing:

“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Now it's hard for you to kick against the pricks” (see Acts 9:4-5; see also Acts 5:8 RE). The pricks were what you used to drive the donkey—if it kicked, it impaled itself, and it could be a fairly nasty wound. They didn't kick without suffering, and Christ is telling him, “That's what you're— You're like a mule; you're so mule-headed about what you're doing, and you're actually doing something that is, ultimately, going to be to your harm.” So Paul comes aboard—he's told to go to Cornelius; he goes to Cornelius. He gets baptized, and then scales fall from his eyes (he's been blinded for a while). Scales are a great word—as an English translation—because they not only imply, potentially—like the scales of a fish; like a contact lens that's opaque, and you can't see through it. But they also imply judgment—that Paul's judgment about things were wrong, and the scales needed to be put aright.

So Paul comes aboard. But Paul is just as much what Paul was “before” as he was “after.” And so Paul and Peter never do quite get on the same page. And Paul writes that he *withstood [Peter] to [his] face, because he was to be blamed* (Galatians 2:11; see also Galatians 1:6 RE), which makes it clear that you can be a Pauline believer in Jesus Christ, witness of His resurrection, and in communion with Him; and you can be Peter, who walked with Him and was told, upon the foundation (that he was part of), that this church would be built. And you can authentically be Christian in both cases and the two of you absolutely not agree on much of anything. So Christ set up, at the beginning, a Christianity in which there was a necessary diversity, a necessary broad-mindedness, a necessary tolerance.

The apostle Peter would write about coming into the union of faith. It's a theme that you see in James; it's a theme that you see in Paul—about **growing** into unity. So why would we have a Christian establishment, at the outset, in which we have this diversity of thought, with the expectation that you will **grow** into unity—and we're told *love one another; as I have loved you...love one another* (John 13:34; see also John 9:5 RE). So why would it be set up that way if Christianity was simply supposed to be “mutually-opposing camps with differing points of view,” in which your-particular-brand-of-Christianity will excommunicate their-brand-of-Christianity, and your-brand-of-Christianity will denounce (as “the great whore”) Catholicism, instead of everyone saying:

- What has the Lutheran group observed about Christianity that can help bring light, knowledge, and understanding to me?
- What has Catholicism preserved from their traditions that can help enlighten my understanding, because it's a treasure that we have not preserved in our own right?
- And what is it within the Baptist movement that has developed a keen insight into some of the most penetrating beliefs that Christ taught?

Why do we separate into denominational differences and hold this hostility towards one another?

One of the things that I personally believe in is that you have to take the money out of religion in order for religion to ultimately be its greatest self. I believe that in order to have faith, you have to sacrifice for your faith. That means that no one can or should pay me for anything I do as a religious individual. I have to sacrifice to come here. I have to sacrifice to prove my belief in Christ. No one gets to pass a plate, collect money, and give it to me. I have an obligation, instead, to donate, to sacrifice, to serve.

We have an incipient group of people—very small—but people that believe that we do have an obligation to give tithes and offerings. But we collect tithes and offerings in very small groups, and once the money's collected then, within the group, the question is asked, What are the needs; who among us has a need? And if there is a health need, if there's a food need, if there's a housing need—the money is used to benefit those that are in need among the household of faith. And no one gets to be paid. The reason why Catholic priests are hostile to Lutherans, and Lutherans are hostile to Methodists, and Methodists hostile to Baptists, and Baptists hostile to the Church of Christ is because the clergy of the respective denominations have a financial stake in making sure that their version of Christianity survives.

I went out to a Christian Evangelical conference in Memphis, Tennessee a couple weeks ago—again, on my own nickel.

[Stephanie:] Nashville.

[Denver:] Oh, it was Nashville.

[Stephanie:] Not that it matters.

[Denver:] Yeah—no, it was Nashville. It was a national conference, lasted for days—went out with some Evangelical folks, met some new Evangelical friends; and our last day there, when we were on our way to the airport, the driver was a retired Air Force Chaplain. (He'd been enlisted; he left, used the GI bill to get through ministerial school, became a Chaplain, came back in as a Captain, served his twenty years, retired.) After he was retired, he went to work as a Methodist church leader—I think Bishop; he was ordained to something—and he led a Methodist congregation in South Carolina until he retired again. And he was being paid retirement from both the Air Force and from the Methodist church because their clergy have a financial setup in which they're not only compensated during their time of ministry, but they're then also compensated in the retirement. So, he's all on board with Methodism, and that's just the way things work in this world.

During the period of time between that very first generation of Christianity and 324 AD, when Constantine determined that it was a mistake to have made Christianity the religion of Rome because they were in disagreement, and his internal strife was not going to be solved by making Christianity (he thought it was **one** religion)—

The factions were so opposed to one another over teachings that they literally were—Christians were killing Christians. And so the answer to the need of the Roman empire to have a state religion that would unify was not going to be served. And so he had (what is called by the “historical Christian movement”—and that includes everyone, it includes all denominations—they called it) the First Great Ecumenical Council. He summoned all the Bishops to Nicea; he put them under arrest, and he told them they could not leave until they reached an agreement on some fundamentals of what the Christian faith was so that once that was adopted, we had an orthodoxy. And they nearly got unanimity, but there were a handful that would not agree, and they were exiled from Rome. So they had a state religion that was now agreed upon.

If you look at what are called the ante- (or the prior-to), the ante-Nicene fathers—and you read the works of the ante-Nicene fathers, there are a lot of teachings that were still left over from that first generation that began to evaporate once you reach the 324 AD time period. It still required years of conflict—and many more years of death and killing—before Christianity settled down into a stable form that you could call “orthodox.”

During the time period prior to 324, there were multiple kinds of Christianity. One of them gets identified as “proto-orthodox.” The reason the one form is regarded as proto-orthodox is because it will eventually win the battle. Once it’s won the battle, then you can go back in hindsight and you can say, Well that was the one that was the predecessor to what will become orthodox Christianity over time. That was the Petrine church—or the Petrine view—which emphasized priestly authority, which emphasized the necessity of a priestly intervenor.

That view held sway until a split that occurred at about [1000] AD between the East and the West, between Constantinople and Rome, between two Bishops who were vying for primacy. And so you have the Orthodox Christianity that spread into Eastern Europe and into Russia—the Greek Orthodox Church being part of that; the Russian Orthodox Church being part of that—and once again, they preserved some teachings in Christianity that got dropped off the table in the Western church (or the Catholic church)—doctrines that you don’t hear much about.

You get down another 500 years to 517 [1517] AD, to the time of Martin Luther, and Martin Luther comes along a devout—

He was a sincere, a religious man as ever lived in the Catholic faith. He believed. And he believed with all his heart—believed so much, that he saw signs in his life of God intervening to do things. He saw miraculous events that showed him that God was walking with him. Martin Luther went to Rome and was horribly disappointed by what he saw as corruption and as profiteering and as something that could not possibly be true. Because these men were doing vile things—prostitutes were at court with Bishops; everything about what was going on was unseemly.

But Martin Luther believed. In fact, in the universe of Martin Luther's Christianity, salvation required a priest "to save." If you did not have a priest, you could not access salvation. And so Martin Luther's dilemma was, "Is it possible—is it even possible to be a Christian, separate from the clergy that comes down from the time of Christ? Is that even possible?"

Reading in the New Testament in the book of Romans, he comes across the passage that says it is by grace that you are saved; it's through the instrumentality of faith, and that faith is, in itself, the means for salvation. So Martin Luther conceives the idea that salvation just might be possible, separated from the Catholic clergy, if you rely upon the grace of Christ and the faith that you have in Him. And so Martin Luther took the brave step of trusting what he had read, and he founded the Protestant movement, based upon the concept that it is possible to be saved separate from, then, a hierarchy that's grounded in Rome. Well, that separation began—

As soon as you have Lutherans, you're inviting someone else to come along—like John Calvin—to say, "Wait a minute. You've got part of the idea, but you don't have it really in place." You have John Wesley; you have Zwingli; you have a number of Protestant leaders, all of whom say, "Yeah, Martin Luther got one thing right, but he didn't get everything right." And so immediately, you begin to divide up, and the Protestant movement morphs into dozens—and then hundreds and now, thousands—of different denominational divisions that are saying, "Yes, BUT—all those other churches got some things right, BUT! There's still something that they've omitted that needs to be done."

So, I was raised by a Baptist mother, and I was shown the Baptist religion from my youth. I never joined the Baptist Church. My next door neighbor, my best friend, was a Catholic altar boy—Rick was a Catholic altar boy! And so was Wayne. Dude! (You'd need to know those two guys before you understand how broad-minded Catholics are about their altar boys.) And so, on occasion, I would go to Rick's church. Mary was really devoted and (his mother)—Rick was just a pedestrian that happened to be, on occasion, in the Catholic church. I was always interested in religion. I always thought there was something to this—that Christianity has a core that is true. I believed that. Over the years, the more I have examined it—

I'm an attorney, and I do trial work. In the courtroom, witnesses of an event (if they're telling the truth) will agree in broad-brush and will disagree on details. If they agree on all the details, someone's lying, because that's not the way witnesses work. Witnesses—

If you're standing on one side of the street and you see an accident, and you're standing on the other side of the street and you see the same accident, what is *left* on one is *right* on the other. They will disagree, if nothing else, from the vantage point from which they observed it. You also have the tendency to focus on "something," as opposed to "everything." And if everyone is focused on a different "something," the story that you will get from people—swearing to tell the truth, under oath—will be different versions; same general theme, same large-picture outcome, but they will disagree many times on the details.

“Oh, I didn’t notice that”—because that’s the way humans are. “I didn’t notice that. I didn’t hear that. You’re sure he said—he really said that? Because when he was speaking, he said *this*, and I know he said *this*. The reason I know he said *this* is because *that* struck me to the heart. And when he said that, I was thinking back about twenty things in my life, and so when I tuned back in—you’re telling me that one of the things I missed is what you heard about *that*? I find that astonishing! I wish I’d heard it.” My story and your story and the next person’s story of the event (if they’re authentic, in the courtroom), you will always find details are different. Same major theme.

Jesus Christ had a group of witnesses in a **single** generation—in a **single generation!** This isn’t a work of fiction! You have **four** different gospel accounts that come into being **in a single generation of time**, in which they all agree on the massive truth that this was the Son of God who came into the world to be the sacrificial lamb, who died—He was rejected and died—and who was resurrected and ascended into heaven. All four of them agree on that. And yet, only Matthew has the Sermon on the Mount. Some of them mention feeding five thousand; some of them mention feeding seven thousand; and some of them mention both. But not all of them mention everything. There are differences. It’s what you would expect if you’re dealing with an authentic account of a real person that lived a real life and left behind people who were so astonished by what they witnessed from this man that they wrote accounts. And whereas, *before*, they were cowering, and they were running, and they were denying that they knew that man, *after* His resurrection (and they witnessed that), they went forth boldly and proclaimed who He was, performing miracles themselves, based upon the name of Jesus Christ. *Something* actually happened. And that *something* was the life of Jesus Christ. And these men went willingly; whereas, *before* they ran and hid, *after* His resurrection—after they became acquainted with Him—they went willingly to their deaths as witnesses of Him.

So I believed that there was something authentic about Christianity. I just wasn’t quite sure about the *brand* of Christianity that my mom, a Baptist, was teaching me in my youth. I also—going down to the Catholic Church—was skeptical. (It was Pope John VI—was the pope back then; seemed like a decent enough chap. The first Catholic pope that impressed me was Pope John Paul I. That guy was—he was a fan of Mark Twain’s, ok? Pope John Paul I was the greatest pope that ever lived, as far as I’m concerned.)

I thought there was something missing from the *Baptist* faith. I thought there was something theatrical and hollow, even inauthentic, about what I saw in *Catholicism*—not because the pageantry wasn’t depicting something noble and great and wonderful, but because the players weren’t always up to the job of carrying off the pageantry. There were times when it appeared to me that the last thing the priest in Mountain Home, Idaho was interested in was celebrating the service—the Mass. He did it anyway, and it was lifeless. His heart wasn’t in it. And so, it seemed to me, hard for that to drive religious conviction if the heart of the priest is not in the celebration of the Mass. The *Baptists* were always into the celebration of what they do because it’s based upon a sort of charismatic movement, in which enthusiasm is expected—an expected part of it. But I remember the pious gestures, the things from the pageantry of *Catholicism* that depicted things, that depicted

holiness—and I believe there *is* holiness. I honestly believe there to be holiness. But I think it is hard to imitate it, instead of authentically *be* it. That's why a Mother Theresa stands out as a global figure because she didn't imitate it. And Mother Theresa stands as evidence that there is such a thing as Catholic holiness.

Another one that stands out in history as an authentic evidence of Catholicism having holiness is St. Francis; St. Francis believed and accepted the Sermon on the Mount. He lived the Sermon on the Mount. He went to Rome to get an order commissioned by the pope, and the pope laughed at him and said, "You can't—you can't get anyone to live the Sermon on the Mount." He said, "I would give you an order if you could come back here and bring with you twelve men who would be willing to live the Sermon on the Mount." (St. Francis was the guy that—if you saw him in the cold in winter and you gave him a coat—he would wear that coat until he ran into someone that had a greater need than he; and then he would give away his coat to the person in need. When he decided he was going to become a priest, his father—who was a wealthy man—went and intervened and said, "You can't do this—everything about you, I paid for! You are utterly dependent upon me, and I refuse to let you go do this." St. Francis took off all his clothes, handed it to his father, and came to the clergy a poor and naked man—literally. He was a devout man.) When he came back to the pope with twelve believers, the Franciscans were commissioned, and the order of the Franciscans came into being.

The current pope is named after St. Francis. I think St. Francis was an authentic Christian. In the last two months of St. Francis' life, he reported that angels were visiting with him. There are a lot of people that dismiss that end-of-life spiritual experience (and telling tales of angels and visits and such things) as, you know, the frailties of a dying body. I don't think so, in the case of St. Francis. I think that he was ministered to by angels.

There's an expression—it's found in places some of you would find dubious—but there's an expression about how some people do not "taste death." The statement that they do not taste death doesn't mean they don't die. It just means that their death is sweet because they die in companionship with those on the other side who bring them through that veil of death in a joyful experience. There are a handful of people who have reported that, as they were dying, angels came and ministered to them. I think all authentic Christians, in any age, belonging to any denomination—I don't care what the denomination is—I think all authentic Christians who depart this world find that death is sweet to them and that they are in the company of angels as they leave this world. And I don't think it matters that the *brand* that you swore allegiance to—and you contributed your resources to support—matter anywhere near as much as whether you believe in Christ, whether you accept the notions that He advances about the Sermon on the Mount, and whether you try to incorporate and live them in your life.

Jesus took the Law of Moses as the standard. What the Sermon on the Mount does is say, "Here is the standard, but your conduct should not be merely **this**." *Thou shalt not kill* is not enough—you must avoid being angry with your brother; you must forgive those who offend you; you must pray for those who spitefully use you. Just refraining from

murdering one another, with a reluctant heart, bearing malice at them—“Well, I didn’t kill the guy, but I got even!”—that’s not enough! That’s not the standard that Christ is advancing. *Thou shalt not commit adultery* is not good enough—don’t look upon a woman to lust after her in your heart. Jesus is saying, “Here’s the law. And you can do all of those things and be malevolent; you can be angry; you can be bitter; you can be contemptible; you can hold each other out as objects of ridicule. Its purpose is to make you something more lovely, more wonderful, more kindly, more Christian.”

Christ says to be like Him. The Sermon on the Mount is an explanation of what it’s like to be like Him. St. Francis made the effort of trying that, of doing that. I suspect that the first time St. Francis gave away a coat in the middle of winter to someone else, that it pained him. He probably felt the biting sting of the cold and thought, “How wise is this that I’m doing?” Because it’s always hard to accept a higher standard and to implement it for the first time. But I suspect by the hundredth time he’d done that, he didn’t feel the cold anymore; he felt the warmth in his heart of having relieved the suffering of another person. Because the practice of Christian faith involves the development of Christian skill and the development of Christian charity in a way that changes you. You don’t remain the same character that you were when you began the journey! You become someone absolutely and fundamentally different.

So, while I was in the Air Force, away from home, I was attending a University of New Hampshire night-class—some kind of organizational behavior class. Having grown up in Idaho, I knew what Mormons were, and this professor, Cal Colby (he’s from Brandeis University, but he was teaching a night class for the University of New Hampshire) just gratuitously started attacking Mormons. And my honest reaction was, “What the hell are you talking about Mormons in New Hampshire for? That’s a local infestation somewhere out in the West, and there’s no—there’s none of that going on here.” And in the middle of his diatribe, a guy raised his hand, and Colby called on him. And a fellow named Steve Klapproth defended—because he **was** Mormon—defended Mormons. I made the mistake afterwards of saying to the fellow (I didn’t know his name at the time, but I know him now—Steve), “Good job!” I always hate it when a person in a position of strength picks on someone in a position of weakness, and so I went to the guy that was weak and said, you know, “Good job!” He mistook this for interest in his religion. And I wound up (trying to be polite), I wound up being hounded, literally—pamphleteered, missionaries coming. It was—it was gosh awful.

Well, I left New Hampshire on what’s called “Operation Bootstrap,” where they send you to college. I went to Boise State University. The Air Force paid for me to go to school. I came back. When I came back there was this campout; the campout was at the birthplace of Joseph Smith in Sharon, Vermont. And I went to the campout. There was a book that was in the Visitor’s Center, and they gave me a copy of that book for free. Steve says, “You should read this.” I read that. And at that moment, I was surprised because my reaction to Mormonism had been very, very negative. But the ideals that were expressed in this one statement were lofty and noble and Christian and charitable, and I wanted to know, “Where

did this come from?" It was something that Joseph Smith had written; a revelation that Joseph Smith had received.

Well, I got baptized for the first time in my life on September the 10th of 1973, into the Mormon church. I was a Mormon until September the 10th of 2013—forty years to the day. And on the 40th anniversary of becoming a Mormon, I was excommunicated from the Mormon church.

So, I don't say this to sound like I'm bragging or exaggerating, but I do not know anyone alive today that knows as much about Mormon history as I do. Because while I was part of that, and then afterwards, still, I've read every historical document that I can get my hands on; I've read everything that Joseph Smith said that got recorded, wrote, or transcribed when he had a scribe writing for him. My understanding of Mormon history is encyclopedic, really.

There's a thing that goes on in Salt Lake City called the Sunstone Symposium. It's run by people who are, basically, renegade Mormons—intellectuals—and it started out being friendly to the Mormon church; it grew into outright hostility and anger towards the Mormon church; and then it converted into a mixed bag. And some of it is pro; some of it is con. And I've spoken at the Sunstone Symposium. One of the things I've presented was a paper about Brigham Young, in which Brigham Young's megalomaniacal-presiding over Mormonism (during the late 1840s, into the early 1850s) and the excesses that went on during that time period—including murders that occurred on Brigham Young's watch—were laid out. Sunstone asked the Dean of Mormon History—the guy that is most respected, Thomas Alexander—to respond to my paper. And Thomas Alexander came and responded to my paper. I was talking about Brigham Young's literal regarding of himself as an actual king from the time they got out of the valley in 1847, until the time he was deposed by the Army of the United States as the territorial governor in 1857. I was talking about that period of time. Thomas Alexander got up and said, "No, Brigham Young didn't believe those things because he said things in 1860 and in 1870..." and he read the quotes from 1860 and 1870. Well, as soon as he was deposed as governor he *knew* he wasn't king. All 1860 and 1870 have to contribute is the fact that Brigham Young ultimately managed to grapple with reality because he had been deposed. But what he was saying in that early time period is exactly what he meant. So after Thomas Alexander got through with his rebuttal paper, I got up and, for five minutes, dismantled the Dean of Mormon History's view.

The Mormon church is a cult. It is not an authentic Christian organization. But I believe that you can find Christians who are Mormons. I believe that you can find Christians in every denomination that are out there. I believe that there is an authenticity to belief in Christ that transcends every denomination that's out there. I wrote books about the history of Mormonism that expose many of the things that the Mormon church represents to be true—I show to be false, including their authority claims; including their consistent following of what the founder of Mormonism stood for, believed in, and practiced himself.

Joseph Smith raised the largest Army. The largest standing Army in the United States in 1844, was under the command of Major General Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois. Literally, he could have taken on the United States Army and defeated them. And do you know what Joseph Smith did with a standing Army larger than anyone else in the United States; larger than the federal government; larger than any of the state militias? Do you know what he did? He disarmed his soldiers; he turned the cannons over to the state of Illinois; he surrendered to the governor of the state of Illinois; and three days later, he was murdered while he was in jail. He would rather personally die or give up his life than to have people on both sides of a fight die as a consequence of a religious dispute.

In 1837, Joseph Smith was in Missouri; and while he was in Missouri, hostilities broke out between Mormons and Missourians. Part of the problem with the hostilities was that leaders around Joseph Smith were spoiling for a fight—literally, spoiling for a fight. Guy named Sidney Rigdon who was a counselor to Joseph Smith gave a speech in which he said, If you people show any more aggression towards us, we're going to wage a war of extermination, and we will wipe all you Missourians out. It's called the Salt Speech; it was delivered on July the fourth of that year. It's an incendiary talk.

There was a Mormon named Sampson Avard who went about provoking hostilities with the Missourians. Sampson Avard was a Mormon, and he had a group that he called the Danites, based upon the tribe of Dan. (The blessing that is given to Dan in the 49th chapter of Genesis talks about Dan being an asp in the way that bites the horses. It's a preamble of the violence that the tribe of Dan would render in the posterity of Dan. So Sampson Avard took the name "Danites" as his group.) And they began to retaliate by burning houses, burning fields, stealing cattle, stealing hogs, bringing them back. Joseph Smith found out about it and he demoted Sampson Avard. He was relieved of all responsibility, and Joseph made him a cook. So the guy who was the militant leader is now a cook.

Hostilities ultimately did break out. It was inevitable that there be retaliations. Each side were saying that they were the victim, and the governor of Missouri said, "We're gonna wage a war of extermination," quoting what the Mormons had said in that July 4th talk. And so Mormons were expelled from the state of Missouri. The militia was outside Far West, Missouri—a town called Far West. Joseph Smith and his family, friends, and Mormons were inside Far West. They had a defensive position from which they literally could have caused so many casualties that the militia could never have overrun the town. The cost in blood would have been too high. Joseph Smith surrendered and told his people to surrender their arms, and he deflated the tension.

He was taken into custody by the state of Missouri; he was charged with treason against the State for fomenting rebellion. And they had a series of hearings trying to get witnesses to prove that Joseph Smith should be held for trial on the charge of treason. And no one—no one—could prove that Joseph Smith was involved with any of the hostilities, until the guy who actually caused the hostilities, Sampson Avard, came to the courthouse to testify—to blame Joseph Smith for everything he had done.

And so Joseph Smith was held over on the charge of treason, based upon the testimony of the guy who knew what cattle were stolen, what hogs were stolen, what fields were burned (that he was responsible for.) And he simply said that all that—that Joseph engineered that. And so, based upon the testimony of traitors, Joseph Smith was held in prison for a period of six months, over a winter time period in an unheated dungeon that had bars but no glass on the windows. And they suffered for six months in a Missouri prison.

He was allowed to escape and get back to his people, all of whom had been driven out of Missouri. But while he was in prison—and while he had the opportunity to think about everything—Joseph Smith composed a letter from Liberty Jail that breathes with the spirit of Christian compassion, forgiveness, love, kindness, and refraining from abusing others. This is a man who got betrayed by his friends, and he turns around and shows—for his friends—compassion.

One of the books that I've written is called *A Man Without Doubt*. In it, I set up the historical context out of which Joseph Smith produced the three longest writings of his own in his life. It's A Letter from Liberty Jail; it's Lectures on Faith; and it's a statement of his own history because the church historian had stolen all the manuscripts. Time and time again, the worst enemies of Joseph Smith were Mormons—people that claimed to follow the religion that he was developing.

Joseph Smith, in my view, is authentically Christian the same way as Saint Francis is authentically Christian. The problem is (and it is an enormous problem)—the problem is that everyone outside of the Mormon world looks at him as the property of the LDS Church. They look at him as if he were accurately represented by a group of people that, time and time again, he condemned and, time and time again, betrayed him. *A Man Without Doubt* is an attempt to let people see Joseph Smith as a Christian, divorced from the LDS Church or any of the splinter Mormon groups, and to see him, potentially, as an authentic Christian—in the same way that I think Martin Luther and John Wesley—even John Calvin, although Calvin was so militant, he's kind of a drum-beater that scares me a little—nevertheless, he was authentically Christian.

I think that everyone who sacrifices for the cause of Christ can help contribute to my understanding of what it means to follow Christ—because people who follow Christ bear the evidence of that discipleship in the way in which they walk and the things that they do and the things that they give up—in how they discipline their heart and how they discipline their mind; in how they treat one another. When you find someone whose life bears evidence that they are authentically Christian because of what they do; they are authentically Christian because of what they say—

Christ said it's not what goes into the mouth that proves you're unclean. It's what comes out. What do you say? How do you display the grace of God in your life? I can tell you one way you **don't** display the grace of God—and that's by condemning, merely because of their affiliation with one Christian group or another, condemning them as being inauthentically Christian.

Christ looks upon the inner person. All of His parables—all of His parables suggest there's something very different about authenticity and inauthenticity. There are ten virgins—well, what are virgins a symbol of? If Christ is using the virgin as a symbol, He's talking about good people. These are—these are good religious people; they have to be. And of that group, only five were allowed in.

There's a wedding feast—and at the wedding feast, he invites friends, and they don't come. Well, who are the friends of Christ that are invited to come to His wedding feast? And they don't come. They don't come because their hearts aren't right; their words aren't right; their mind isn't right; they are not authentically what Christ is trying to have us be. But He invites, and they don't come—because they will not be His. And so He goes out, on the highways and the byways, to try and find anyone that will come. And “anyone that will come” suggests that, well, they could be a Samaritan. Think about the Parable of the Good Samaritan from the perspective of a Jewish audience—they were nothing but apostates! And yet he uses the **apostate** as the illustration of authentic Christian discipleship. They invite in—off the highways and the byways—strangers, people that you don't expect to be invited 'cuz they're not at your church every week; they're going to some other place or, perhaps, no place at all. And yet, they're invited in, and they're allowed to remain, so long as they have on the wedding garment. In other words, if they come, having donned the mantle of authentic Christianity, they're welcome—they're welcomed. We care and we fight about religious issues that are of no moment at all to Christ. And we do that because we're paying clergymen every week to rile us up so that we'll stay loyal to them and their congregation— and we'll contribute, and we will view one another with fear and non-acceptance.

You take the money out of Christianity, most ministers would go into politics. They would not hang around. I'm not lying—they have done polls of Christian ministers to ask them if they believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who was resurrected. The majority of Christian ministers do not have faith; what they have is a career. And they can't abandon their career. “If I leave your employ, what's gonna become of me? Because I'll be a poor man.” And so they stay employed, preaching what they don't believe. It's one of the reasons why I think Father Ordway—in Mountain Home, Idaho—made the gestures, and his countenance was devoid of the holiness that should be expressed, of the joy that should be expressed. I saw that in my friend Rick's mother, Mary. I saw in her that—that fire of belief, that devotion. I didn't see it in Father Ordway.

Well, I'm trying to get people to consider the possibility that authentic Christians could come from anywhere, among any people—and that we can fellowship with one another. And that it is even possible to fellowship with one another, even independent of an employee-hireling priest—in which we study together; we worship together; we rejoice in Christ together; we try to figure out how to be more authentically Christian in what we do, and what we say, and how we treat one another, and how we view one another.

And then to take the next step and to contribute our tithes and our offerings to a group of believers to **help believers**, to help each other—so that it's not just the support of the clergy and the support of the buildings, the support of the programs—but it's also helping the fatherless and helping the mother who has no one to help her. And to have Christianity not just theoretically modeled in feel-good sermons but actively part of life and part of how we deal with and treat one another, in which we all say, “We've all sinned; we've all fallen short of the glory of God, but let's not let that cause me to condemn you. Let's not let that stop me from trying, in as authentic a way as I can, to be charitable or kindly to you, and you to me, and us to the people in need among us.” Because if there were ever an authentic group of people who are Christian who were helping one another, the appeal of that would cause everyone who comes into their midst to have a change of heart. They'd want to be part of that; they'd want to live that kind of life because there's no better life than the one that Christ taught us to model in the Sermon on the Mount.

Anyway, I've talked for an hour—and my experience teaches me that when you've had people sitting and listening to you for an hour, you're a wicked and despicable man if you make them sit and listen to you any longer. So, unless there's anything that someone wants to talk about, ask about—

I really do know a lot about Mormon history, and it's not at all what the Mormon persona is represented to be—either by the church itself or by its critics. In some ways, its history is much worse than the critics tell you. And in some ways, the very beginning of it was much different and much better than what they represent.

I believe that Brigham Young introduced the practice of plural wives. I believe that Joseph Smith was an ardent opponent of that. I believe that Joseph Smith has been falsely portrayed because Brigham Young didn't think he could bring that into the practice unless he laid it at the feet of Joseph Smith. And I think there's been a lot of history in Mormonism that tries to lay at the feet of Joseph Smith responsibility for the things that traitors and treacherous and evil men did—and escape responsibility for it by saying:

“Joseph taught it.”

“Oh, he taught it in private.”

“Oh, he lied to the public.”

“He lied to the public about it, but in private he practiced it, and he taught it.”

And I have to tell you, Joseph Smith was not that kind of man. I read the letters between Joseph Smith and his wife, Emma. Emma was a stronger personality than Joseph. Emma was his trusted counselor and guide. Joseph deferred to her; he took advice from her; he took counsel from her. She was better educated than him. The stories that have been attributed to Joseph Smith—

You should read *A Man Without Doubt*. You should go back and reconsider whether what you think Joseph was is it all supportable by a true-telling of history—because I don't think it is. And that's one of the reasons why I'm an excommunicated Mormon because—

Because I think the truth is valuable, and it's worth searching out.

[End recording]

[Transcription v1.1]