

Witnesses of the Book of Mormon — Insights Episode 17: What is your Witness?

Oliver Cowdery: Brother David, be true to your testimony of the Book of Mormon. Live according to the teachings in the Book of Mormon, and you will meet me in Heaven. Now I lay down for the last time; I'm going to my Savior.

Martin Harris: Yes. I did see the plates on which the Book of Mormon was written. I did see the angel. I did hear the voice of God, and I do know that Joseph Smith is a true prophet of God, holding the keys of the Holy Priesthood.

David Whitmer: I want to say to you all that the Bible and the record of the Nephites are true, so you can say you heard me bear my testimony on my deathbed. All be faithful in Christ, and your reward will be according to your works. God bless you all. My trust is in Christ forever, worlds without end. Amen.

Camrey Bagley Fox: We have been talking to Gerritt Dirkmaat in our series about the witnesses of the Book of Mormon.

So, Gerritt, what does it mean, to you, to be a witness?

Gerritt Dirkmaat: Wow, I can think of so many different ways of answering that, but, I mean, these witnesses are people who are willing to put THEIR name on the line, that whatever they said happened had actually happened.

To be a witness is to be the affirming force, that the claim that might seem to be too good to be true, is, in fact—actually. The witnesses have been essential since the time of Jesus. It is those who are witnessing that Jesus really is resurrected, because it's obviously FAR easier to believe the story that circulates after Jesus's resurrection, that His followers just came and stole His body. Much, much, more difficult to believe that for the first time in recorded history someone came back to life, and that they continue to live.

In a religious sense, I feel like witnesses to these miraculous events, they give us confirmation that these miracles are what people said they are. And that it's not just simply this lone voice crying in the wilderness. It's not just Peter saying that Jesus was resurrected. It's Peter, and it's James, and it's John, and it's all the apostles, and it's Mary. And it's Joseph Smith, 'Because I saw him,' as he says.

Being a witness is someone who has said, 'I am willing to stake everything on what I believe about God in this regard.' And it's obviously a little bit more personal in the sense that as Latter-day Saints, we all make a covenant, in however poor a way, I guess, be a witness of Christ, in all times, and all places.

I feel like these first-hand witnesses, these people who saw, these people who knew, it carries more weight in the sense that we have all kinds of people today that will try to

tell us things like, ‘Well, if only you knew what I knew, then you wouldn’t really believe. If you knew what I knew about The Book of Mormon, you wouldn’t think that it’s from God.’

And the reality is the people who know Joseph best, the people who were there, they’re certain the Book of Mormon’s from God. So, I’m not exactly sure what someone on a blog is going to be able to share with me, that has greater weight than Oliver Cowdery saying, ‘I saw that angel. I wrote nearly every word as it dropped from the lips of Joseph Smith as he translated The Book of Mormon.’

His witness carries power because it’s something that none of us can have today, and that is that real-time personal witness of the miracle as it took place.

Now I believe we can all know whether or not we experience that miracle. We all can experience our own miracle. But it’s not just Joseph Smith saying that he saw God. It’s Joseph, and Oliver, and David Whitmer, it’s Emma Smith talking about the miracle of the translation. It’s Mary Whitmer saying that she had the angle appear to her. It’s Amanda Barnes Smith talking about the miraculous healing of her son after he was shot at Haun’s Mill.

We have multiple witnesses to the miraculous nature of this work, to the fact that Jesus Christ lives, to the fact that God is our father, but it still does require faith on our part. There are always going to be skeptics, there are always going to be people who say, ‘Well, I don’t really think that’s what happened.’ Or ‘I find it really hard to believe that’s what happened.’ And my response to them is that that’s exactly why we believe it. I believe in miracles BECAUSE they’re miraculous. It wouldn’t be a miracle if it could just be explained some other way.

And that’s our connection; God gives us those miracles, I think as a way for us to understand our place in the world—that we have a connection to something far greater than ourselves. To bring it back around, I really feel like that’s how the witnesses saw themselves. They had a connection to something far greater than themselves because of their miraculous vision. And so because of that, they wouldn’t deny. Even though it would have won every argument they needed to ever win with Joseph, they wouldn’t deny. Even though it would have given them much greater social standing, they wouldn’t deny. Even though it would have ended the persecution that followed them throughout their life, they didn’t deny. And I think that’s because they knew, like Joseph writes in his history, ‘I had seen a vision. And I knew it, and I knew God knew it.’ And I think they felt the same way. ‘There’s a lot of things I can get cross-eyed with Joseph on, but I saw an angel.’

GD cont’d: I think for those of us who’ve experienced miracles in our lives, who’ve seen miracles, if we told them to enough people, people would say, ‘No, that didn’t really happen. Oh, I’m sure there’s another explanation for that.’ That doesn’t change the fact that it was a miracle. It doesn’t change the fact of what I saw. I think to be a witness is to be willing to have your name affixed to whatever the claim is, because you saw it. Not

just because you heard about it, but you were a part of it. And these men, they were a part of it.

CBF: Thank you so much.

GD: You're welcome.

CBF: And thank you for joining us.

GD: Thank you.