

Sunday, October 4

Third Day

organize a church and choose an earthly head, but he cannot secure recognition of his work—he cannot place the Savior at the head of his human church. The administration of the ordinances in such a church has no validity.

Christ Is the Head of the Church

Some have questioned whether the Mormons are Christians. We answer emphatically, yes. We repeat what we have reverently declared since the organization of the Church, that Jesus the Christ is the Savior and Redeemer of the world and that his is the only “. . . name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4: 12.) This has been the solemn testimony of millions who have died and other millions now living. We proclaim his divinity. He is the Son of the Living God, the Redeemer and Savior of the human race, in short, the Christ. How do ye know this? Our knowledge comes from the same source as did the Apostle Peter's. Jesus said to him:

“... flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 16:17.)

Humbly and reverently, but without

equivocation, we solemnly bear this testimony to the divinity of the Christ and the restoration of the gospel, and promise that the Holy Ghost will also bear witness of its truth to anyone who prayerfully seeks divine guidance.

We make this declaration, bear this testimony, and leave with you our love, our blessings, and our invitation to become better acquainted with this remarkable message that the simple gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored again to the earth, for we announce it humbly in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President N. Eldon Tanner

We have just listened to President Hugh B. Brown of the First Presidency.

The Tabernacle Choir will now favor us with that beautiful selection, “Almighty God of Our Fathers.” Following the singing Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Council of the Twelve will address us.

President N. Eldon Tanner

We shall now hear from Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Council of the Twelve.

ELDER HOWARD W. HUNTER

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

I would like to invite you to turn back the pages of history nearly two thousand years and walk with me down Damascus Road. This ancient way commences at one of the gates through the north wall of the city of Jerusalem; winds through the hills of Judea; crosses the Jordan River, the plains of the Decapolis east of Galilee; and goes over the plateau to the city of Damascus, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. It was on this road, two or three years after the crucifixion and resurrection of the Savior, that a marvelous event took place which changed the course of a man's life and in turn has had an effect upon the lives of millions of persons.

Saul Born a Roman Citizen

In the city of Tarsus, the Hellenistic

capital city of Cilicia which was rival to Alexandria and Athens, was born a Jewish boy who was given the name of Saul. By birth he was a Roman citizen because Cilicia had become a Roman province under the great Roman general and statesman, Pompey. History has not recorded much of his early childhood, and we have very little information concerning his father and mother, but it is assumed by most scholars that they were people of means and position. His father was a Pharisee, one of the two major religious and political divisions of Judaism. The Pharisees were the leading sect and held most of the political offices in the state as well as the high priestly offices. They believed in a resurrection and in a future life where men would be rewarded or punished

according to their deeds in this life. The Sadducees, on the other hand, denied a resurrection. The Pharisees observed the law of the Sabbath, tithing, and ceremonial purity. They were known for their comprehensive knowledge of the law and their strict observance of it. Saul followed in the footsteps of his father and was a devoted Pharisee.

At Tarsus he learned the trade of working with his hands in weaving goat's-hair cloth and in fabricating it into tents. This is not inconsistent with the assumption that he was a student of the law because Jewish students were taught a trade so that they might provide for themselves by their own hands.

Gamaliel's Pupil

While in his youth, Saul went to Jerusalem to be educated as a rabbi at the feet of Gamaliel, who was considered the most outstanding teacher of his time. This great rabbi and doctor of the law taught the doctrine of strict compliance with the law, which was fundamental with the Pharisees, yet he was liberal in some respects, and his teachings were tempered with moderation. As a member of the Sanhedrin, he argued a course of tolerance and took a firm stand against the prosecution of Peter and the other apostles after the death of the Master.

Under the teaching of Gamaliel, Saul became a zealot for God, a serious and a pious man. He hungered and thirsted after righteousness and sought diligently to keep the law in every respect as a devout Pharisee. In spite of the fact he had been a pupil of Gamaliel who taught tolerance, Saul became an extreme persecutor of those who did not comply strictly with Pharisaic Judaism.

Persecuted the Christians

After the crucifixion of Jesus, widespread persecution was soon commenced upon those who followed his teachings. The activity of Stephen, a Hellenistic Jew, in this new cause brought him into conflict with the Jews of Jerusalem, who, being angered by his eloquent presentation of the new faith, brought him to trial before the Sanhedrin on the charge of blasphemy. The age-old traditions of Judaism and the doctrines of Christi-

anity, the two opposing orders, were brought into sharp focus.

Stephen's statements before the Sanhedrin concerning his faith in Christ so maddened his accusers that they dragged him from the tribunal and stoned him to death. Saul was present at the trial. He stood by and held the garments of the chief witnesses while they killed Stephen. Following this, Saul began to participate actively in the campaign against the Christians. This is the usual course of a man's life as he turns toward evil. First, he is a silent observer, then he becomes a consenting spectator, and finally he is an active participant.

To this time there had not been a separation of the Christians from the synagogues of the Jews, but the hour had come when the gospel of Christ should take the place of the law of sacrifice, and the rupture with Judaism was imminent.

The persecutions which followed suppressed and dispersed the followers of Christ from Jerusalem and scattered them throughout Judea and Samaria, thus aiding the spread of Christianity. Like the tiny mustard seeds which grew into large plants, mentioned by the Lord in the parable, the seeds of Christianity were scattered to the wind and fell upon fertile soil. As the plants began to grow, Saul was determined to stamp them out. His zeal as a defender of the faith was unloosed against the followers of Jesus. A Christian man's house was no longer his castle, for Saul entered into every house and dragged both men and women before the magistrates, who in turn committed them to prison.

On the Damascus Road

Apparently Saul, one of the main instigators of the persecutions, feared the spread of the gospel of Christ to more distant places. He went to the high priest in Jerusalem and secured a commission in writing to the synagogues in Damascus, authorizing him to take into custody the Jews of that city who had become followers of Jesus and return them to Jerusalem in chains. This authority was issued, and Saul commenced his journey down Damascus Road. The record gives no information as to the other persons

in the company, the number of days it took to make the long journey, the conversation that may have taken place, or any of the happenings along the way, until the day they came near Damascus about noon ". . . and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth, . . ." (Acts 9:3-4.) This Pharisee who had come on an errand of persecution and those who were with him heard a voice from the midst of the light saying: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul answered: "Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." (*Ibid.*, 9:4-5.) This proverbial expression of kicking against the pricks usually refers to the ox goad which was a piece of pointed iron stuck in the end of a stick used to urge the ox while drawing the plow. Sometimes a stubborn ox will kick back against the goad only to receive its sharpness more severely. It has become a proverb to signify the absurdity of rebelling against lawful authority.

Saul had been kicking against the goad, and now he was humbled to the dust. "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

"And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man." (*Ibid.*, 9:6-7.)

Saul stood upright, but he could not see; his eyesight had been taken from him, and he was as blinded physically as he had been spiritually. Those who were with him led him by the hand into the city and to the house of Judas in the street called Straight. For three days he neither ate nor drank but waited for the Lord to reveal to him what he must do as he had been instructed by the voice.

The Climax

On the third day the Lord appeared in a vision to a Jewish Christian named Ananias and told him to go to Saul. Ananias demurred, for he had heard of the evil done by this man to the Saints in Jerusalem and knew of the authority he had received to arrest the believers

in Christ in Damascus, but he did as the Lord instructed. When he came to the house of Judas, he found Saul and laid his hands on him and administered to him saying, ". . . brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." (*Ibid.*, 9:17.) Saul had been instantly blinded on Damascus Road, and his sight was instantly restored when Ananias laid his hands on him. To make his conversion complete he was baptized. Paul's life was changed. It is remarkable that the man who held the garments of Stephen's executioners thereafter became the chief exponent of the principles for which Stephen died. Soon there was commenced the great ministry of which the Christian world is so familiar, by the one whose name became romanized and known as Apostle Paul.

Paul's Purpose and Life Changed

These are the facts from the record of one of the most important encounters in history. There are those who are skeptics and cannot reconcile the events which might be classified as supernatural. Appearances of Deity and voices and visions are often looked upon with suspicion. Some are inclined to explain away the marvelous experience of Paul by saying it was merely the imaginative culmination of an inner conflict of a man who had taken a strong position in defense of the law, who had resolved to stamp out the threat to Judaism, but who had a deep feeling that he was doing wrong. It doesn't seem likely that the whole course of a man's life upon which he was so urgently set would be changed so suddenly and drastically by an inner conflict. Men who are as determined as Paul are not quickly changed although there may have been a spark which had smoldered for a long time before bursting into flame that day on Damascus Road.

Some have said it was the long journey from Jerusalem to Damascus which gave him time to think and contemplate during the days of travel upon the recent events of the persecution. Paul had been present at the stoning of Stephen and

had seen him die. He heard him ask in his last words that those who had dragged him from the Sanhedrin and stoned him in defiance of the law might be forgiven for their acts. This must have made a lasting impression on the mind of Paul. He had personally gone from house to house and brought men and women before the tribunals which condemned them to prison or imposed the sentence of death. Because of him, many had left their homes and fled. Now he had traveled to Damascus with further threats to inflict persecution upon those who followed Christ. Could it be that these things commenced to weigh heavily upon his conscience?

Paul Tells of His Conversion

Paul testified on many occasions concerning his conversion, that he had seen Jesus our Lord and that the vision was a reality. In the book of the Acts of the Apostles there are three accounts of the conversion. The first is the record of Luke in which the conversation between the Lord and Paul is set forth. In the second account Paul personally relates the facts of the conversion in his speech to the angry crowd on the steps of the temple in Jerusalem, and the third is his defense before King Agrippa, the nephew of Herod, who had tried the Savior just a few years before. Standing in the elegant surroundings of the court of the king, Paul spoke in his own defense, recalling his youth, his beliefs as a Pharisee, his part in the persecutions, and the marvelous vision on Damascus Road. After bearing witness of Jesus he said: "Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." (*Ibid.*, 26:19.)

Paul's life had been bisected by Damascus Road. Before, he was an aggressive persecutor of Christianity, but after Damascus Road he was one of its most fervent propagators.

Others Like Him

There are many men in the world who could be like Paul, men who could be changed in the twinkling of an eye if willing to change the object of their lives as did Paul. There are some who see but do not believe. One needs to be only a bystander to see, but to believe,

one must accept wholeheartedly and commit himself to his belief. This requires faith and repentance of old ways. Paul had been raised in the belief his family had held for generations. He had been trained in that faith, and it is fair to say that he understood it, but it was not until that day on Damascus Road when Jesus spoke to him that the object of his life was changed. There are persons in every church who see, but some do not believe. Because they have been raised in the beliefs of their fathers, their minds are closed, and they are satisfied to continue. We wonder why it took Paul so long to see the light and why he so vigorously opposed the teachings of the Savior. The answer is apparent. He was born into a certain belief and followed it until it became a habit. He had a preconceived idea of the law which closed his mind to the truth until that event on Damascus Road.

Need Paul's Experience of Conversion

Nearly two thousand years have passed. Many of the problems and questions of Paul's day are with us yet because of tradition and preconceived ideas. The prophets of old foretold of the coming of the Savior and the establishment of his Church. They also foretold that the gospel would be taken from the earth because of the corruptions of men and again established before Christ's second coming. The fulfillment of these prophecies has been confirmed by history. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints declares to the world that the true gospel of Jesus Christ was taken from the earth and that it has been restored in our day. A young man who had been pondering and questioning the established faith of his fathers had the simple faith to seek his Heavenly Father in humble prayer. In response, a glorious vision burst upon this young man, a Prophet of the Lord, in a manner similar to that given to Paul. God the Eternal Father and his Son Jesus Christ, two separate and distinct Personages, appeared to him and instructed him. By reason of this event and the subsequent events by which God revealed his mind and will to men, the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored in its fulness for the benefit of all mankind.

It is startling to many in the world to learn that there is a prophet of God on the earth at the present time who speaks to us the will of the Lord, and of this fact I bear witness. There are hundreds of thousands who also so testify, yet today as in Paul's day there are others who see but do not believe because of old traditions, closed minds, and preconceived ideas. For this reason I invited you to walk with me down Damascus Road. If you are willing to do so with a prayer in your heart for the truth, the Lord will shed his light upon you as he did Paul, and the truth will be made manifest to you.

I further testify that God does live and that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of all mankind. He will bring light to

those who honestly seek it. May the Spirit of God be with you, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President N. Eldon Tanner

(Brief organ interlude, followed by singing by Choir and congregation, "Now Let Us Rejoice," without announcement.)

A number of television and radio stations have just joined us. We welcome all those who are tuned in on this Conference session. We shall now hear from Elder Sterling W. Sill, Assistant to the Twelve, and he will be followed by Elder Marion D. Hanks of the First Council of Seventy.

ELDER STERLING W. SILL

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve Apostles

There is an ancient Greek myth about a giant race called Titans that once plotted an assault on heaven. Armed with missiles and firebrands, they hurled themselves against the gods, seeking their overthrow. But the thunderbolts of Zeus and the arrows of Hercules were too much for the attackers, and the Titans were finally destroyed.

From this story we get the word *titanism*. This is a word intended to represent our unfortunate human inclination to fight against righteousness. Following the example of the ancient giants, our world is presently conducting an all-out war against God and his purposes.

Conflict With God

Jesus prayed, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10.) And from the very beginning Deity has been trying to raise our standards to this level for which the Redeemer prayed. He has failed only because of the opposition of those he has been trying to help. Our human history is made up of a long unpleasant record of antagonism toward God.

Disobedience brought about the expulsion from Eden. The spirit that

caused Cain to murder his brother Abel in order to possess his flocks spread quickly over the earth. Human society was not very old before it was necessary for God to invoke the flood in order to cleanse the earth of its sin. This watery devastation was closely followed by the confusion of tongues and the dispersion of the sinners of Babel. In the Meridian of Time rebellion against God led to the rejection and crucifixion of the Savior of the world, and this tragedy was followed by that long black night of apostasy that we call the Dark Ages.

Leading Rebel

The scripture reminds us that Satan himself became what he is because of his sin of *titanism*. In the great antemortal council described in the scriptures, Satan sought the overthrow of God himself and succeeded in drawing away from God one third of all of the heavenly host. Since that time, Satan's fight has continued with increasing power to reach its pinnacle of evil in our own day.

Elements of the Conflict

Certainly the greatest problem of our generation is its *titanism*, as shown by our enmity toward the Almighty.