

Bishop Robert L. Simpson of the Presiding Bishopric will now speak to us, and he will be followed by

Elder Milton R. Hunter of the First Council of Seventy.

BISHOP ROBERT L. SIMPSON

First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric

Twenty years ago during World War II, I walked near the Mediterranean Sea by a city known anciently as Caesarea Philippi. I was all alone. I had come there with the hope of recapturing some of the surrounding influence that gave background to one of the significant discussions of all time. I refer to that occasion when the Savior had asked his disciples: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"

The Great Testimony

"And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets."

Then Christ became more direct, ". . . But whom say ye that I am?"

"And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16:13-16.)

As never before, the strength, the power, the conviction of that testimony declared so many centuries before had become mine to cherish and harbor as an integral part of my own personal testimony.

Reawakened at Caesarea

What happened to me that beautiful morning in the coasts of Caesarea Philippi was not unique nor was it physical in any way. As Christ explained to Peter: ". . . flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." (*Ibid.*, 16:17.) Peter was the recipient of personal revelation! And in like manner this same sweet confirmation of testimony can permeate the hearts of all truth-seeking, conscientious Latter-day Saints the world over. This great gift of personal revelation is unmistakable; it is direct. It is a more sure communication than the audible spoken word; for that which we hear through mortal ears

is sometimes distorted, so often misunderstood. This precious gift of spirit speaking to spirit is infallible and direct and, in the case just cited, came from a loving Heavenly Father to his faithful disciple Peter.

During this same conversation, Peter's revelation was referred to as a rock—a rock firm and immovable. ". . . and upon this rock," the Savior declared, "I will build my church." (*Ibid.*, 16:18.) He selected rock as the perfect symbol of uncompromised truth, the only possible foundation upon which to build his true Church—the rock of revelation.

This same rock of revelation is broad enough for all mankind to build upon. It beckons to all individuals who are willing to put on his yoke, for it is easy and the burden is light. The author of all truth has declared it so.

As a child of God man is never forsaken by him. War and contention among men whether it be an international conflict or a form of family disunity is not God's will. Man's unhappiness is of his own making—a direct result of nonconformity to the plan of life as contained in Heavenly Father's blueprint for happiness. Men never fail because of God's revealed word, but rather, in spite of it.

We Can Know as Peter Knew

So how can we know as Peter knew? How can a person achieve this reassuring, motivating certainty that God lives? Surely, if there were no doubts our course would be undeviating. Can it be that only a few are chosen to receive this most precious gift of personal assurance?

The purpose of all creation is, hopefully, that all men may qualify to return to His presence. Now, there are

those who spend most of a lifetime debating with themselves. They ask: Is it worth it? or, How can I truly know that this or that is God's will?

As the Savior taught in the temple on one occasion, the Jews marvelled at his wisdom and knowledge. "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" they asked.

"Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." (John 7:14-17.) The key phrase, of course, is, "If any man will do his will." The doing is of prime importance.

Meekness Brings It

We are always touched when we hear a chorus of Primary children sing, "I Am a Child of God." The last two lines of that inspired song read: "Teach me all that I must know, To live with Him some day." I understand that future printings will follow a wise suggestion made by Brother Kimball, that the word "know" be changed to "do." "Teach me all that I must do, To live with Him some day." Only in the doing can we be assured of a confirmation by the spirit—yes, by good works we do become eligible for personal revelation.

May we now turn to another important key to this vital and sought-after knowledge of Deity. Two thousand years ago the great high priest Alma was travelling from city to city. He knew something about personal revelation and seemed most anxious to share it with those he attempted to teach as he declared:

"Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?"

"Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made

them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me." (Alma 5:45-46.)

Fasting and Prayer

Now, Alma points out here that he did something more than just carry on the work. He hastened his process of sure knowledge through fasting and prayer. "I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself." These same principles will work for each of us today. Fasting has been practiced by men seeking spiritual strength from the very beginning of time. David the Psalmist tells how he humbled his soul with fasting. (2 Sam. 12:16ff.)

And now speaking of prayer, if prayer were important for Alma, it is important for us, too. It is folly to think in terms of having this highly spiritual information made known to us by the Holy Spirit, without first parting the veil through prayer. It was this important step that led to this greatest of all dispensations, the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times. The young lad Joseph was touched by that invitation of Holy Writ, the promise given for all men alike: "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." (Jas. 1:5.)

To Gain Wisdom

When we want bus travel information, we go to the bus terminal; when we want financial assistance, we seek out a banker; so why not go directly to God for a confirming testimony of him and his work?

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

"For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

"Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

"Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

"If ye then . . . know how to give good gifts unto your children, how

much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. 7:7-11.)

There is no sweeter work than his work. There is no joy to compare with the blessed assurance of obedience to his laws and ordinances. But we only do his work and obey his law when we are convinced that it is most important. This is why we must remove with all haste those barriers that would prevent such assurance from a loving Heavenly Father who is so anxious that we receive. May we guard against the condition that Laman and Lemuel found themselves in. They refused to cooperate in God's work even after receiving unmistakable direction from an angel and the still small voice. Nephi records that they were "past feeling," that they "could not feel his words." (1 Nephi 17:45.) It is interesting to note that it was they, not God, who broke the bond. This seems to be the pattern, and our day is no exception.

The Testimony "Last of All"

I feel sorry for the man or woman who has become so negative that he is "past feeling" so far as the things of God are concerned. But we all rejoice as we see those who stand out in the crowd as a beacon on a hill, declaring with Alma that ". . . the knowledge which I have is of God" (Alma 36:26); those who reconfirm the testimony of Job, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, . . ." (Job 19:25); those who stand firm with Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in their famous declaration, "And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: *that he lives!*" (D&C 76:22. Italics added) and then those who can feel with Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16:16.)

The world needs assurance. The world needs some solid rock to replace shifting sand. The world needs men with conviction about things most important. The world needs the added strength of several thousand more clarion voices that teach only truth because they live by the truth.

To my mind, the main strength of the world we live in is the strength of his true Church. And where is the main strength of his true Church? Not in the buildings on this block, nor is it found in any group of men who might be designated as leaders for a short season. In my opinion, the Church has its foundation in the heart, in the home, and in the testimony of every worthy member. The widow cannot pay her mite, nor is it possible for an unselfish scoutmaster or quorum leader or dedicated bishop to take time to help a boy except the kingdom of God on earth is strengthened and the world is made a little more secure on its foundations.

Indeed, the Savior of the world has declared if a foundation is built on the solid rock of revelation, be it an individual, a group, a nation, or the world, that ". . . the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. 16:18.) Peter heard it on the shores of Caesarea two thousand years ago. I found it still there undiminished twenty years ago, and you can find it in your quiet place today, tomorrow, and forever. May we ever be available for that most precious gift of the spirit—personal revelation—is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President N. Eldon Tanner:

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