

historic Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Utah. We welcome also special guests—national and local government leaders, educational and civic leaders, and stake and ward Church leaders from far and near. We welcome friends from other churches, and also the vast television and radio audiences. We extend to all cordial greetings and welcome to this fourth session of the 141st Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Richard P. Condie, with Alexander Schreiner at the organ, will open these services by singing "Sing Unto God," following which Elder William Roberts, Regional Representative of the Twelve of the New Zealand Region, will offer the invocation.

The Tabernacle Choir sang the anthem, "Sing Unto God," after which the opening prayer was offered by Elder William Roberts, Regional Representative of the Twelve.

#### President Lee

The Tabernacle Choir will now sing "Thy Word Is a Lantern," after which President N. Eldon Tanner of the First Presidency will speak to us.

The number, "Thy Word Is a Lantern," was sung by the Tabernacle Choir.

#### President Lee

Our first speaker this morning will be President N. Eldon Tanner, counselor in the First Presidency of the Church.

## President N. Eldon Tanner

### *Second Counselor in the First Presidency*

We have heard a great deal lately about the Last Lecture Series, in which those who lecture choose their subject as though it were the last they would give. With that in mind, I chose my subject for this conference as though it were to be my last lecture—the most important message I could leave with the people.

#### "Choose you this day . . ."

The subject I have chosen, then, is taken from Joshua: ". . . choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Josh. 24:15.) Shortly after saying this, Joshua, being 110 years old, died, leaving this as his parting message.

As we have listened to the wonderful talks that have been given in this conference, and as we shall listen to those that will follow, I am sure we

will realize that all of them emphasize the importance of serving the Lord.

#### Ancient Israel

We all remember how Moses led the children of Israel out of bondage, and how the Egyptians were destroyed by the Red Sea; how the Lord gave the Amorites and the people of Jericho into their hands so that they might possess their lands, and how Joshua reminded his people of the words of the Lord:

"And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat."

Then Joshua said: "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away

the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord.

"And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

And then he warned: "If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good." And frightened, they responded: "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey." (Josh. 24:13-15, 20, 24.)

### A modern parallel

A parallel to this is found in the story of our pioneer forefathers, who because of their religious convictions had to flee from their beautiful city and homes. Though they suffered much, and many died, they remained true to their faith, and even in the face of all their hardship as they toiled across the plains, they sang: "And should we die before our journey's through, Happy day! all is well." They blessed the name of the Lord, their God, and continued to serve him, and through their righteous endeavors he has blessed and prospered them and their posterity.

As we read the scriptures and as we read the history of the world, we find numerous examples where individuals, communities, and even nations who chose to serve the Lord were saved and prospered—not through their human genius alone, but by the will of God—while others who refused to do so suffered his wrath, were defeated and destroyed.

### God's promises conditional

As recorded in the Book of Mormon: "Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and

from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ. . . ." (Eth. 2:12.)

What a glorious promise! But we find the same "if" restriction that Joshua warned his people about: "If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you." The promise in Ether is conditional only "if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ." Are we headed for destruction by failing to serve Jesus Christ, by failing to live according to his teachings?

### Civilization on trial

In his book *Civilization on Trial*, published in 1948, Arnold J. Toynbee seems to catch this message, as he refers to the rise and fall of civilizations, and recognizes the reason for their declines. He defines history and its pattern of repeating itself, and then he says:

"Our present situation is formidable indeed. A survey of the historical landscape in the light of our existing knowledge shows that, up to date, history has repeated itself about twenty times in producing human societies of the species to which our Western society belongs, and it also shows that with the possible exception of our own, all these representatives of the species of society called civilizations are already dead or moribund. Moreover, when we study the histories of these dead and moribund civilizations in detail, and compare them with one another, we find indications of what looks like a recurring pattern in the process of their breakdowns, declines, and falls. We are naturally asking ourselves today whether this particular chapter of history is bound to repeat itself in our case. Is that pattern of decline and fall in store for us in our turn as a doom from which no civilization can hope to escape?"

He goes on to express his opinion

that the pattern of earlier successes or failures does not necessarily have to be repeated. He says: "As human beings, we are endowed with this freedom of choice, and we cannot shuffle off our responsibility upon the shoulders of God or nature. We must shoulder it ourselves. *It is up to us.*" He suggests what we should do to be saved, politically, economically, and religiously, and states: "Of the three tasks, the religious one is, of course, in the long run by far the most important." (New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 38-40.)

### The key to peace and prosperity

I suggest to you that if we were spiritually sound, if we were living the teachings of Jesus Christ, whom we *must* serve if we are to survive as individuals and nations, then the political and economic problems already would be solved, because by living the Ten Commandments and other teachings of God we could all live together in peace and prosperity. As we review these teachings we can find nothing in them which, if lived, will not make us better and happier in every way.

We are reminded of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Sodom being the chief town in its settlement in the center of the Garden of Jehovah; of Tyre and Sidon, with Tyre a flourishing city of great wealth and beauty, and perhaps the largest city which the Savior is known to have visited; and of Jerusalem, and other great cities and civilizations which have fallen because they turned away from God and became a wicked and adulterous people. And I fear that this is happening rapidly in our own land.

### A prophetic poem

Rudyard Kipling's prophetic poem "Recessional" was a warning to the great and powerful British Empire, when it was at the height of its glory,

and should be a warning to all nations. He wrote:

"God of our fathers known of old,  
Lord of our far-flung battle-line,  
Beneath whose awful hand we hold  
Dominion over palm and pine,  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget, lest we forget!

"The tumult and the shouting dies,  
The captains and the kings depart;  
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,  
An humble and a contrite heart,  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget, lest we forget!

"Far called, our navies melt away,  
On dune and head-land sinks the fire;  
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!  
Judge of the nations, spare us yet,  
Lest we forget, lest we forget!"

—Hymns, No. 76

These examples emphasize so clearly that there is strength in humility and weakness in pride. If we do not repent and change our ways, we will be repeating the history of Sodom and Gomorrah. Let us analyze our accomplishments and find out where our values are. We have made great strides of advancement in scientific fields. We have sent men to the moon and back, developed a nuclear bomb, and made great progress in the methods of war, but what have we done in the interest of peace? What have we done in the field of human relations? What progress have we made in spirituality?

### Need for spiritual renaissance

Can anyone fail to see that we too are living in a wicked and adulterous world, that we are failing to serve God, that we are surely on our way to destruction when in nearly every newspaper and magazine and on the radio and TV stations you read or hear of every law of God being broken: stealing, burning and plundering, killing, adultery, rape, death and calamity through drunkenness,

churches empty and stores and parks and highways full on Sunday. Too many of us who claim to be Christian are guilty of some of these things.

As someone has said: "If we were to be arrested for being Christians, I wonder if there would be enough evidence to convict us?" We have been warned and forewarned. We cannot plead ignorance. If we are to save ourselves, our families, and our country, we must, as Peter taught, repent, be baptized, change our ways, and turn and serve the Lord and keep his commandments. The responsibility rests on us as individuals. We need a spiritual renaissance.

Can you imagine what a glorious world it would be to live in if everyone were living the teachings of the gospel, loving God, and keeping his commandments? If we all loved one another, if there were no backbiting, no killing, no stealing, if everyone were honest, true, chaste, and benevolent? We would have no wars, but peace and heaven here on earth, and we could use the money now spent on war, law enforcement, and crime for worthy purposes to aid the needy, the sick, and unfortunate.

### Preservation through righteousness

When the Lord told Abraham that he was going to destroy Sodom because of its wickedness, Abraham pleaded first for its preservation if there were but fifty righteous, and then finally for even ten righteous. The Lord agreed, but they failed to find even ten righteous, so the city was destroyed. Let us be sure that we can be counted among the righteous for whose sake the Lord would spare our city and our country. It is most important that we decide whether or not we are going to serve the Lord. He himself said: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the

other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matt. 6:24.)

The choice to serve God, worthily made, does not necessarily preclude a home or sufficient money or income, or the things of this world which bring joy and happiness, but it does require that we must *not* turn away from God and the teachings of Jesus Christ while in the pursuit of our temporal needs.

### Temporal and spiritual success

My experience throughout my life has shown me beyond question that if we will live the principles of the gospel as taught by Jesus Christ and the prophets, serving the Lord and keeping his commandments, it will contribute greatly to our success in the worthwhile things of life, both temporally and spiritually. We will raise better families and contribute more to the community than those who deny the Lord and ignore his teachings. In fact, if you look at the people whom you know, you will find that those who live truly Christian lives are happier, and more loved and respected, while preparing for eternal life.

The Lord said also: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matt. 6:19-21.)

### Concern for material possessions

I wonder about our undue concern for material possessions, for shrines and monuments, which crumble and decay. Just the other day I read a news item telling of the deterioration of the Lincoln Memorial. This is disturbing news indeed to all of us who honor those who have done so much

to build and serve their country. But as we read in detail about the limestone walls and marble columns of the forty-eight-year-old monument deteriorating, its mortar flaking away, stalactites and stalagmites transforming its basement into an eerie cavern, millions of spiders and tiny, winged midges swarming over the ceiling, it gives us an outstanding example of the fact that moth and rust doth corrupt treasures on earth. As we pay homage to the revered memories of persons and places, let us at the same time be diligently engaged in our spiritual duties and the preservation of treasures which cannot be effaced by time.

I am reminded of Henry Van Dyke's story "The Mansion," where he tells of the rich man who lived in a mansion on earth but was shocked to find that he had only a tiny hut when he reached heaven. But the poor man found to his surprise that he had a mansion in heaven because he had been laying up for himself treasures in heaven.

### Choice of God or Mammon

As we go through life we are continually making choices which will determine what we get out of life. Are we going to take advantage of our opportunities to improve, or waste our time? Are we going to do right, or wrong? Are we going to go to church, or desecrate the Sabbath? Are we going to serve God, or mammon? We cannot have divided homage. Life must find its mastery.

This does not mean that man is wholly bad nor wholly good, but at any moment he must have a dominant direction, and the choice of God or mammon helps us to determine the other choices we will make in life.

### Training of children

In order to get full enjoyment from the blessings God has promised to those who serve him and keep his commandments, it is important that

parents teach their children faith in God. The Lord has warned:

"And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.

"And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord." (D&C 68:25, 28.)

Realizing the importance of such training, the Church urges its members religiously to observe family home evenings, to attend seminaries, institutes, schools, colleges, and auxiliary organizations to assist in preparing ourselves and our children to serve the Lord. We must not procrastinate in this duty and obligation.

### At the crossroads

I was greatly impressed as I listened to the BYU alumni president, Ernest L. Wilkinson, M.D., tell of an emergency call that took him to the intensive Coronary Care Unit of the LDS Hospital [in Salt Lake City], where a close personal friend of his of several years' duration was in critical condition with a massive coronary thrombosis. He said: "As I approached his bedside he grasped my hand and through an oxygen mask, though gripped with pain and breathing in a labored manner, he muttered, 'Oh, Doctor, can you save me? I have so many things I have been putting off and wanting to do.'

"As we labored into the hours of the morning, utilizing all of the modern electronic gadgetry that medical science can provide, and as it became increasingly evident that my friend would not survive, I was haunted by his comment and its inference. Are we thinkers or its doers? How many of us procrastinate the really important decisions in life?

Will we be found wanting when we too are at the crossroads of life and death?"

This is a serious and urgent question indeed. We are all nearing the crossroads of life and death ourselves. How fortunate we are to be able to make a choice. What a glorious thing it is to know that we can choose our course, write our destiny and determine our blessings. It is not too late to choose. The choice is ours, but we must choose *this day* whom we will serve.

### Salvation through Christ

I thank the Lord every day that I know that God the Father, whose children we are, lives and wants us to succeed, and that he "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." (John 3:16-17.)

Yes, Jesus Christ gave his life for us and gave us the plan by which we can enjoy life to the full and work out our salvation. As Richard L. Evans so beautifully stated: "Our Father in heaven is not an umpire who is trying to count us out. He is not a competitor who is trying to outsmart us. He is not a prosecutor who is trying to convict us. He is a loving

Father who wants our happiness and eternal progress, and who will help us all he can if we will but give him in our lives an opportunity to do so."

I sincerely pray that we will have the courage and strength to humble ourselves, accept our Savior, Jesus Christ, and serve him and thereby enjoy the blessings which he has promised. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. ■

### President Harold B. Lee

He to whom you have just listened is President N. Eldon Tanner of the First Presidency.

The Tabernacle Choir will now sing "Peace and Holy Silence." The soloist in this number will be Sister Marion Vance.

After the singing Bishop John H. Vandenberg, Presiding Bishop of the Church, will address us.

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The Tabernacle Choir sang "Peace and Holy Silence," with Marion Vance as soloist.

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### President Lee

Many stations have just tuned in on this conference, and we wish to extend to them a cordial welcome.

Bishop John H. Vandenberg, Presiding Bishop of the Church, will now address us.

## Bishop John H. Vandenberg

*Presiding Bishop*

A young mother, having had the trying experience of losing a little child in an accident, came to a church leader for a blessing to comfort her in her grief. As she left, she asked through her tears, "Must there always be pain in this life?"

### The first family

As we consider this question, let us recall the first family on earth. We read in the Bible that Eve "conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord.