

Saturday, March 31

First Day

having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

“And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God.” (2 Ne. 31:20-21.)

God lives. Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. His kingdom will prevail. The greatest joy we can find on this earth is conforming our lives to His law.

This is my witness to you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Following Elder Perry's remarks, the Tabernacle Choir sang the hymn, "Still, Still With Thee," without announcement.

President Spencer W. Kimball

The Tabernacle Choir has sung, "Still, Still With Thee."

We welcome those who have just joined us on television or radio for this, the first session of the 149th Annual Conference of the Church.

President N. Eldon Tanner, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will now address us.

President N. Eldon Tanner

In 1896, about two years before I was born, Mr. R. M. Bryce Thomas from London, England, paid a visit to Salt Lake City, Utah, where he first learned about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Characteristics of the Church and its members

Following this visit, and after a thorough and searching investigation into the practices and doctrines of the Church, and a comparison of the teachings of the primitive Church of Jesus Christ which was established by Him, with his own church in England, he subsequently became a baptized member.

On May 24, 1897, in London, England, he penned an article which he entitled, "My Reasons for . . . Joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." In the preface to the first edition he stated:

"The object that I have had in

view in writing this article, explanatory of my reasons for leaving [my] church [in] England and joining the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is to comply as far as possible with the wishes of those of my relatives and friends who have expressed a desire to know something of the teachings of the Latter-day Saints, and also of the reasons which have led me to reject the faith of my fathers."

He concluded with this paragraph:

"In sending out the following pages then I would ask our Heavenly Father in the name of His Son, our Lord Jesus, to let His blessing rest upon what I have written so far as it may be in strict accordance with His truth, and with His holy word and will" (Liverpool, England: Millennial Star Office, 1897).

In a preface to the second American edition, December 9, 1904, we read:

"Since I penned the pages of this little work, however, I have paid two visits to Utah, and have become personally acquainted with the Latter-day Saints, in Salt Lake City, and in several other towns of that State. On the first of these visits I resided with two well known families of Saints, and obtained thereby the best possible opportunity of mixing freely in the society of this people, and of forming a just and correct estimate of them. . . . That they, in common with the rest of mankind, have their weaknesses and failings is only to be expected, and there will even be found some among them who can claim to be Latter-day Saints in a little else than name; but, taking the people as a whole, I have found them essentially God-fearing, honest, upright, with a firm faith in their Heavenly Father, strong in their testimonies regarding the divinity of the great latter-day work in which they are engaged, and in their belief of the great destiny which awaits them.

"Among the Saints, as among other Christian people, will be found educated and intelligent men and women. Education is a special feature with them, and it is by no means uncommon to find in this community, those who have studied, and those who are at the present time studying vocal and instrumental music and painting in the principal centers of art in Europe, and in the eastern parts of the United States. Musical talent seems to be decidedly conspicuous among them. Various important positions in the State, calling for such qualifications as education, intelligence, ability, and honesty, have been, and are now being filled by Latter-day Saints; while there are those who, having fully qualified themselves in the legal, medical, journalistic, and commercial professions, are following their various vocations with credit and profit to themselves, and advantage to the people of Utah.

"I am now paying my third visit to the capital city of that State, and see no reason to modify the opinion I formed of the Saints during my stay with them in 1901." (First preface, Salt Lake City: Bureau of Information and Church Literature, 1904.)

Without wishing to boast or give offense, but in all humility, and only to give an assessment of the benefits of the gospel in the lives of people, I venture to say that if Mr. Thomas were to visit Utah today, seventy-six years later, I believe that he would still see no reason to modify his opinion.

The Church still has the same organization, the same ideals and purposes, and its people are still motivated to become well educated, to serve efficiently and honestly in the various professions, in government, in industry, in their communities, and in their church, which has grown to the extent that now it is known as a worldwide church.

In 1897 when Bryce Thomas first wrote his article, there were only 37 stakes as compared with over 1,000 today, 18 missions as compared with over 160 missions today, and 222,334 members (that's less than a quarter million) as compared with over four million today.

Church organization and teachings

I quote again from the pamphlet: "I found that this people possessed a beautiful Temple and a very fine Tabernacle, with prettily laid out and well cared for grounds; their houses too were neat and picturesque, with nice gardens attached to them, while they could boast of a Tabernacle Choir . . . , the best that I have ever heard. Everything to do with this people appeared to be most excellently managed and looked after, while their missionaries were preaching the Gospel in most parts of the world, having gone out altogether at their own cost, and at a very great

sacrifice of self in all cases. The Church organization of the Saints too appeared to be complete and effective. . . . I therefore decided to secure some of their books, especially the Book of Mormon, in order to learn more of their character and of their doctrines." (Thomas, first edition, p. 3.)

This he did, and his extensive study convinced him that there truly had been an apostasy from the Church as established by Jesus Christ. He states that he could not find a church which had the same organization and teachings of Jesus Christ as set forth in the Old and New Testament.

He was persuaded through his study that there was need for and was a prophet on the earth through whom the Lord could continue to send his revelations for the guidance of his people—that revelation from God to man had not ceased. He came to understand the importance and necessity of having the Holy Ghost through whom the gifts of the Spirit could be manifest.

He was impressed as he came to understand the prayer of Jesus as he prayed that all his children might be one, even as he and his Father in Heaven were one (see John 17:11). This is his comment:

"Now does it seem possible to suppose that this spirit of Unity, this Comforter, whom Jesus Christ was to send in order to show His followers how to grow like Him, and to guide them into all truth, can be guiding the numerous contending, discordant churches of Christendom, who exhibit such bitterness against each other, bitterness and hatred, which not so many years ago culminated even in the shedding of human blood!" (Thomas, first edition, p. 11.)

His search led him to discover that most of the churches had changed the ordinance of baptism by immersion, the form by which Jesus Christ and his disciples were bap-

tized, which is practiced in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Regarding infant baptism, he found there was no trace of such until the Third Century, and therefore it was not part of Christ's original church. He found it hard to accept a doctrine which taught that the sin of Adam was within little children, for he felt that an infant is perfect in Jesus Christ and has no sin of which to repent.

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, children are not baptized until they are eight years of age, or the age of accountability.

Vicarious temple work

From the Bible Mr. Thomas learned that baptism for the dead was practiced in the primitive Church, but had been done away with in latter days. He found much evidence to support this doctrine which caused Paul to write in an epistle to the Corinthians:

"Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" (1 Cor. 15:29.)

Peter answered that question in these words:

"For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit" (1 Pet. 4:6).

We know by the scriptures that the gospel is preached to the dead and the dead are to be judged according to men in the flesh and live according to God in the spirit. Thus baptism is necessary for those who, during their lifetime, had not opportunity for this ordinance of baptism by immersion for the remission of sin.

Only in the Church of Jesus Christ do we find temple work which

is performed for the living and vicariously for the dead, who rely on us for the performance of this work on behalf of those who cannot do it for themselves, even as we relied on Christ to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

The Lord has said, referring to baptism for our dead, "For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect" (D&C 128:18).

God has provided the way to attain this perfection through genealogical and temple work so that we may trace our ancestry and link family to family back to Adam. This work is being done today in the temples of the Church and in fulfillment of the prophecy by Malachi, who said:

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:

"And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." (Mal. 4:5-6.)

Apostasy and restoration

In view of all the evidence to show that the different churches which sprang up into existence following the death of Christ and his apostles had departed from the truth and changed the ordinances of the primitive Church, it is easy to understand and accept the fact that there was an apostasy, which had been predicted by Old and New Testament prophets.

During the period known as the Dark Ages, there was not a prophet on the earth to reveal the word of God to man, and there was even further departure from the true gospel and more changes in the ordinances as practiced in the original Church.

Eventually, as prophesied by John the Revelator, the gospel was restored to the earth through Joseph

Smith, who was chosen as a prophet and to whom were committed the keys of the Restoration and of the establishment of the Church on the earth in these, the latter days.

I invite you to read the story of Joseph Smith and of the personal appearance of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, which is a new witness for Christ in America and a companion to the Bible.

Ezekiel refers to these two books as the Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph, and prophesies that they shall become one, meaning that they proclaim the same gospel and teach the same doctrines (see Ezek. 37:16-19).

Now let me summarize some of the reasons given by Mr. Thomas for joining the Church:

1. The moral character of the people as a whole, their faith in God, and their testimonies regarding the divinity of the work in which they were engaged.

2. The completeness and effectiveness of the Church organization, with the same ordinances as in the church established by Jesus Christ.

3. The restoration of the gospel following the Apostasy, and the need for a living prophet through whom God could continue to reveal his word for the guidance of his people.

4. Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, prohibition of infant baptism, and baptism for the dead, all of which were doctrines taught in Christ's original church.

5. Genealogical and temple work for the living and the dead, as referred to in the Old and New Testaments.

Testimonies of converts

Reasons given by converts who join the Church today are similar and so varied as to lead to the conclusion that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can supply the spir-

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First Day

itual as well as the temporal needs of any person who is seeking for the truth.

Let me share with you some personal testimonies and reasons for joining the Church.

In Florida a young couple was visiting different denominations and finally happened upon an LDS church, where they attended a meeting. They said:

"We found it to be different from any church we'd visited before. After having the lessons and going to church, we decided this was the church we'd been seeking all along." The mother stated that it was surprising to see what the children were learning about the Bible and Jesus Christ, the changes she noticed in their relating better to other children, and their helpfulness at home.

Family and home life also changed for them when her husband received the priesthood, which increased his self-confidence and desire to improve their family life and relationship.

A man in Ecuador met some missionaries on the street near his home and invited them in. They left tracts, pamphlets, and a copy of the Book of Mormon. He read them and liked them and later said of the missionaries:

"I liked their teachings. They taught me things my own church had never taught. I realized I had to live the commandments they told me about. The Word of Wisdom has given me a new life. I know it is of the Lord not to use tobacco, tea, coffee, or liquor. When the elders were teaching me, I knew I had to live it if I were to have a good life. The elders told me to pray about it; then they had to teach me how to pray."

In Finland a woman, lost and lonely following the death of her husband, was found by missionaries who answered some of her questions. She said:

"I was amazed at their answers.

They talked about a reunion with my husband. We had had a wonderful marriage, and I just couldn't think that it would end just like that. My minister had given me no answers, but those young missionaries told me a beautiful concept of eternal life. I listened in tears and wanted to hear more."

She studied and read the Book of Mormon, received a testimony, and was baptized.

A convert in England tells his story. Bitter over the death of an infant who had died without baptism and was therefore denied burial in the church cemetery, he was ready for the missionaries his wife had invited to his home. His first question was about the Church's teaching on infant baptism.

The elders cited a passage from the Book of Mormon which teaches that infants are incapable of sin and that they have no need of baptism because they are saved.

Then he made this comment: "It was the kind of doctrine Christ would teach. I simply couldn't see how a loving God could feel any other way about children. Then the elders gave me a lesson in obtaining a witness to gain a testimony. I put it to the test, prayed, and received a witness. I felt the burning in my bosom just as the scriptures described. I knew it was true."

He made this further comment: "One of the most joyous principles to me is celestial marriage. I feel that if people could understand this and really love their husband or wife, they would join the Church on this alone. It's a wonderful principle."

Finally, I will deal briefly with the conversion of a Protestant minister, who after much tribulation and persecution by ministers and friends when he decided to convert, gave the following testimony:

"I have written this in order to show that as in the Bible, when a man finds a 'pearl of great price,' he

will sell all that he has if necessary in order to obtain it [see Matt. 13:46]. I have found that peace and truth within the Mormon church for which I had been seeking for over twelve years.

"I have not quite completed my first reading of the Book of Mormon, but already the riches of its truths as set down by the Prophet Joseph Smith have become a vital part of our family's spiritual life. No man could have written this book except through the power of God. We accept the test of hatred through which we have passed as God's test of our sincerity in our seeking. . . .

"My prayer is that others will not continue to willfully blind their eyes, refusing even to read the Book of Mormon in order to learn. No man can read this book and not have his life changed. I have not overnight become an expert on the Mormon faith, but I am an eager student and am not afraid to learn what the Holy Spirit would teach through those to whom He has given the authority.

"My personal tragedy as a Protestant minister was that I wasted a good deal of valuable time trying to keep going an organization and institution which no longer, with any stretch of imagination, can be shown to be doing Christ's work."

Invitation to study scriptures

May I invite you all to study the scriptures, wherein are found the words of eternal life and the way to exaltation.

Jesus said, "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

This is so important, that he gave his life for us that we may be resurrected, and he gave us the plan of life and salvation by which this may be accomplished. Read the

Bible and the Book of Mormon, which testify of the things which I have told you this day.

If you are searching for happiness in this life and eternal life with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ hereafter, then I would exhort all of you to find the way, the truth, and the life, which is in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The Choir sang "The Lord's Prayer" without announcement following President Tanner's address.

President Spencer W. Kimball

President N. Eldon Tanner, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has just given the concluding address, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing, "The Lord's Prayer."

We are grateful to the managers, and operators, of many television and radio stations, for offering their facilities, as a public service, to bring the proceedings of this Conference to a large audience, throughout many areas of the world.

We shall conclude this session of the Conference with the Tabernacle Choir singing, "Sing Praise To Him."

Following the singing, the benediction will be pronounced by Elder F. Enzo Busche, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, and President of the Germany Munich Mission.

The Choir sang the number, "Sing Praise to Him."

Elder F. Enzo Busche pronounced the benediction.
