

We are pleased to welcome those who are gathered in the Tabernacle for this, the second general session of the 153rd Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We also welcome those who are participating by means of television or radio, and also the many who are watching in over six hundred stake centers throughout the United States (including Alaska) and Canada to which the conference is being carried by satellite transmission. We note that Elders Dean L. Larsen and Ronald E. Poelman are presiding at the overflow session in the Assembly Hall.

We are pleased to acknowledge especially our guests who are present this afternoon, along with general and local Church leaders and members from many parts of the world.

We express our appreciation to the owners and operators of the many radio and television stations and to the owners and operators of cable systems for their cooperation in making these proceedings available to members and friends of the Church in many countries.

The music for this session will be provided by the Mormon Youth Chorus under the direction of Robert C. Bowden with Roy Darley at the organ.

The chorus will begin this service by singing "I Need Thee Every Hour." The invocation will be offered by Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

The chorus sang "I Need Thee Every Hour."

Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi offered the invocation.

President Benson

The chorus will now sing "O Divine Redeemer," following which Elder Thomas S. Monson, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will speak to us.

The Mormon Youth Chorus sang "O Divine Redeemer."

Elder Thomas S. Monson

The National Gallery at Trafalgar Square in London, England, is one of the truly great museums of art in all the world. The gallery proudly proclaims its Rembrandt Room and Constable Corner and urges all to take the tour of Turner's masterpieces. Visitors come from every corner of the earth. They depart uplifted and inspired.

Labels on paintings

During a recent visit to the National Gallery, I was surprised to see displayed in a most prominent location magnificent portraits and landscapes which featured the name of no artist.

Then I noticed a large placard which provided this explanation:

"This exhibition is drawn from the large number of paintings that hang in a public but somewhat neglected area of the Gallery: the lower floor. The exhibition is intended to encourage visitors to look at the paintings without being too worried about who painted them. In several instances, we do not precisely know.

"The information on labels on paintings can often affect, half-unconsciously, our estimate of them; and here labeling has been deliberately subordinate in the hope that visitors will read only after they have looked

come. His dear wife felt exactly as he did. Their unique manner of tithing payment continued throughout their earning lives.

Gustav and Margarete Wacker established a home that was a heaven. They were not blessed with children but mothered and fathered their many Church visitors. A sophisticated and learned leader from Ottawa told me, "I like to visit President Wacker. I come away refreshed in spirit and determined to ever live close to the Lord."

Did our Heavenly Father honor such abiding faith? The branch prospered. The membership outgrew the rented Slovakian Hall and moved into a modern and lovely chapel of their own. President and Sister Wacker had their prayers answered by serving a proselyting mission to their native Germany and later a temple mission to the beautiful temple in Washington, D.C. Then, just three months ago, his mission in mortality concluded, Gustav Wacker passed away peacefully while being held in the loving arms of his eternal companion. Only one label appears fitting for such an obedient and faithful servant: "Who honors God, God honors." (See 1 Samuel 2:30.)

"The Lord looketh on the heart"

A label frequently seen and grudgingly borne is one which reads: "Handicapped."

Years ago, President Spencer W. Kimball shared with President Gordon B. Hinckley, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, and me an experience he had in the appointment of a patriarch for the Shreveport Louisiana Stake of the Church. President Kimball described how he interviewed, how he searched, and how he prayed, that he might learn the Lord's will concerning the selection. For some reason, none of the suggested candidates was the man for this assignment at this particular time.

The day wore on. The evening meetings began. Suddenly President Kimball turned to the stake president

and asked him to identify a particular man seated perhaps two-thirds of the way back from the front of the chapel. The stake president replied that the individual was James Womack, whereupon President Kimball said, "He is the man the Lord has selected to be your stake patriarch. Please have him meet with me in the high council room following the meeting."

Stake President Charles Cagle was startled, for James Womack did not wear the label of a typical man. He had sustained terrible injuries while in combat during World War II. He lost both hands and one arm, as well as most of his eyesight and part of his hearing. Nobody had wanted to let him in law school when he returned, yet he finished third in his class at Louisiana State University. James Womack simply refused to wear the label "Handicapped."

That evening as President Kimball met with Brother Womack and informed him that the Lord had designated him to be the patriarch, there was a protracted silence in the room. Then Brother Womack said, "Brother Kimball, it is my understanding that a patriarch is to place his hands on the head of the person he blesses. As you can see, I have no hands to place on the head of anyone."

Brother Kimball, in his kind and patient manner, invited Brother Womack to make his way to the back of the chair on which Brother Kimball was seated. He then said, "Now, Brother Womack, lean forward and see if the stumps of your arms will reach the top of my head." To Brother Womack's joy, they touched Brother Kimball, and the exclamation came forth, "I can reach you! I can reach you!"

"Of course you can reach me," responded Brother Kimball. "And if you can reach me, you can reach any whom you bless. I will be the shortest person you will ever have seated before you."

President Kimball reported to us that when the name of James Womack was presented to the stake conference,

"the hands of the members shot heavenward in an enthusiastic vote of approval."

The word of the Lord to the prophet Samuel at the time David was designated to be a future king of Israel provided a fitting label for the occasion. It certainly was the thought of each faithful member: "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Like a golden thread woven through the tapestry of life is the message on the label of a humble heart. It was true of the boy Samuel, it was the experience of Jesus, it was the testi-

mony of Gustav Wacker, it marked the calling of James Womack. May it ever be the label which identifies each of us: "Lord, here am I." In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Benson

Elder Thomas S. Monson, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder Marion D. Hanks, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

He will be followed by Elder Charles Didier, also a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

Elder Marion D. Hanks

I desire to speak this morning of the value of our free agency and of the love that preserved it for us and which should motivate and direct our use of it.

Suppose civilization were about to end

Many years ago I was introduced to an idea which at first seemed only an exercise in imagination, or perhaps a peg on which to hang a story. But I have thought of it occasionally since as I have traveled the earth, often separated from family and other loved ones.

Suppose that everyone in the world received simultaneously the word that the inconceivable was about to occur: civilization as we know it was about to end.

What would happen?

Well, for one thing, the streets would be a maelstrom of frantic people trying to get to a telephone to talk with someone. Every line would be jammed and every telephone booth besieged by people trying to reach someone to say "I love you." There would be other messages also. "I'm so sorry," would be one of them, or "How foolish I have been."

God loves us and believes in us

The condition of the world about us assures us that the unthinkable could happen; but it is not of such a cataclysm that I am thinking, but of our daily walk and our everyday relationships. They who love should manifest their love while there is a chance to do so. If we are waiting for some later time, some period when all imperfections are corrected and when all frustrations pass away, we are not wise. Resentment or pride or selfishness or impatience can lead us to miss what life is meant to be, and can be, and is for those who love and serve. To postpone loving and giving until some time of perfect freedom from distress or discomfort is a great mistake; it will not happen. It is not for this world.

But we should be earnestly seeking and striving to correct and improve our own attitude and our own behavior. God has so ordained it. He loves us and believes in us and has done and will do anything he can to help us, but he will not impose on our free agency. "We love him," says the scripture, "because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). He does not love us because we love him;