

Howard W. Hunter of the Council of the Twelve Apostles; Lucille Thurman Buehner, widow of Carl W. Buehner, Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric; Margaret Ann Newman Wells, widow of John Wells, Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric; Blanche Black Stoddard, former general Relief Society secretary; and Paul Benjamin Tanner, former general Sunday School treasurer.

### President Benson

Elder Neal A. Maxwell, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will be our first speaker. He will be followed by Elder A. Theodore Tuttle, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

## Elder Neal A. Maxwell

My public and warm welcome to Elder Nelson and Elder Oaks, choice friends of many years, as they now enter into an even deeper friendship.

### Great plan of the Eternal God

One of the great blessings flowing from amplifying, latter-day revelations is the crucial, doctrinal framework known as the marvelous plan of salvation, the plan of happiness, or the plan of mercy. (See Alma 42:5, 8, 15.) However designated, it represents what Amulek called the "great plan of the Eternal God" without which mankind would unavoidably perish (Alma 34:9).

The plan is a most stunning example of the precious perspective of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, full faith in the Lord Jesus Christ includes and requires full faith in His Father's plan of salvation.

President Brigham Young declared: "The Spirit of revelation must be in each and every individual, to know the plan of salvation and keep in the path that leads them to the presence of God" (*Journal of Discourses*, 9:279).

### Jesus Christ at the center of the Father's plan

So vital is this framework that if one stays or strays outside it, he risks provinciality and misery. In fact, most human misery represents ignorance of or noncompliance with the plan. A cessation of such mortal suffering will not come without compliance to it. Hence, the Lord, who has freely shared this vital knowledge with us, has urged us to teach the fundamentals of this plan "freely" (Moses 6:58).

At the center of the Father's plan is Jesus Christ, mankind's Redeemer. Yet, as foreseen, many judge Jesus "to be a thing of naught" (1 Nephi 19:9), or "consider him" merely "a man" (Mosiah 3:9). Whether others deny or delimit Jesus, for us He is our Lord and Savior! Comparatively, brothers and sisters, it matters very little what people think of us, but it matters very much what we think of Him. It matters very little, too, who others say we are; what matters is who we say Jesus is. (See Matthew 16:13-17.)

For instance, we appreciate not only the towering divinity of Jesus Christ, but His breathtaking mobility and the scope of His shepherding. The resurrected Jesus revisited the Middle East scene of His mortal messiahship. Then some souls in the Americas. (See 3 Nephi 11.) And then His other lost sheep. (See 3 Nephi 17:4.)

## God's paternal purpose

In His selfless plan, the Lord doeth nothing save it be for the benefit of the children of men. (See 2 Nephi 26:24.) He labors, lovingly and constantly, as Moses and Jeremiah declared, "for our good always" (Deuteronomy 6:24; see also Jeremiah 32:38-40). In His grand design, His "work" and "glory" are "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). Thus, even when we truly learn to love God, we must humbly acknowledge that He loved us first. (See 1 John 4:19.)

Meanwhile, Shakespeare was not very wide of the mark in writing, "All the world's a stage" (*As You Like It*, act 2, scene 7). But not for playacting!

The very word *plan* confirms God's paternal purpose, a realization so desperately needed by the confused and despairing on the world's stage.

The "plan of happiness" not only ensures the immortalization of our individual identities, but can yield bettered and reborn individuals. Fittingly, one appreciative prophet declared, "O how great the plan of our God!" (2 Nephi 9:13). Enoch wept when he saw the sweep of history and the unnecessary human misery. (See Moses 7:41.) But he also saw the triumph of God's plan. Another prophet exclaimed: "God . . . made these things known unto us that we might not perish . . . because he loveth our souls . . . ; therefore, in his mercy he doth visit us by his angels, that the plan of salvation might be made known unto us" (Alma 24:14).

It took visits by angels in our day, too, in order to instruct us anew regarding God's plan of salvation and to reassure us that mortality is not a conclusive and massive mausoleum, and that death is not extinction.

## Longing for a heavenly home

Alma faced an awful and anguished moment when he felt that he might actually "become extinct both

soul and body" (Alma 36:15). Then he remembered his father's prophecies "concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world" (Alma 36:17). In a moment of deep intellectual humility, his "mind caught hold upon this thought." Out came Alma's great soul cry: "O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me" (Alma 36:18).

Purpose replaced pain. Joy swallowed up despair as Alma apparently viewed God upon His throne, and he longed to join God! (See Alma 36:22.)

Such longing for a heavenly home is real, especially in view of how this life is designed. After all, brothers and sisters, when we rejoice in beautiful scenery, great art, and great music, it is but the flexing of instincts acquired in another place and another time.

## Plan of mercy

Life turns out, however, to be just what one would expect of a deliberately constructed proving and tutoring experience which features opportunities, choices, and deprivations. Furthermore, there is no way *around*—the only way to go is *through*!

And what a "through" it is!

Even so, for us mistake-prone mortals, this plan of mercy provides for recognition and redress of error and for the resumption of interrupted individual development.

Redemptive and refining provisions are made: For a brave Peter faltering and sinking on the churning waves—and yet knowing to whom to look to live, and crying out, "Lord, save me" (Matthew 14:30). For a meek Moses struggling with people, fatigued and with all the burdens of leadership. (See Numbers 11:11, 14, 29.) For a Jonah seeking to substitute Tarshish, but still reaching Nineveh and, thereby, receiving a great lesson in compassion. For erring Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and Thomas B. Marsh to recover their spiritual poise and vote with their feet by traveling westward to rejoin, in reconciliation, and to sustain

the plan and its enunciating latter-day prophets.

Hence, brothers and sisters, for the faithful, our finest hours are sometimes during or just following our darkest hours.

### God sees end from beginning

It is an incredible irony, therefore, that some complainingly attempt to use the very tutoring process of the Lord against Him. Or resent the reality that we are to walk by faith during this mortal experience. Yet, as practical and spiritual President Brigham Young said, "There is no saving faith merely upon . . . acknowledging a fact" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941], p. 154).

Furthermore, since this life is such a brief experience, there must be regular exit routes. Some easy. Some hard. Some sudden. Others lingering. Therefore, we cannot presume, even by faith, to block all these exits, all the time, and for all people. Nor, if possessed of full, eternal perspective, would we desire so to do.

Since certain recollections are withheld, we do not now see the end from the beginning. But God does. Meanwhile, we are in what might be called "the murky middle." Therein, however, we can still truly know that God loves us, individually and perfectly, even though we cannot always explain the meaning of all things happening to us or around us. (See 1 Nephi 11:17.)

### Christ's doctrines mark the way

Enclosed in this mortal cocoon, or classroom, we would be totally provincial in outlook except for faith in, and knowledge of, the "great plan of the Eternal God."

Hence, Christ's doctrines pertaining to the plan of salvation stand like sentinel scriptures to mark and light the way. His gospel guardrails line the strait and narrow path to steady us,

nudge us, and even jar us for the sake of our spiritual safety!

So much more than a matter of abstract theology, this great plan can focus daily life. Its truths are crucial to how we see ourselves, others, life, the Lord, and even the universe. Or how we view a baby. Or death. Or the praise and honors of the world. This plan constitutes the mother lode of meaning and can cradle us, conceptually, amid any concern.

Its truths and perspectives permit us to distinguish between a great book and mere want ads, between vengeance and justice, rage and righteous indignation, and pleasure and happiness.

### Unconditional surrender to God's plan

With an understanding of God's plan of salvation, we know that the rejoicing, the striving, the suffering, the tutoring, and the enduring experiences of life all play their part in an intelligible process of helping us, if we will, to become, as the Savior beckoningly invited, "even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27).

This individual development sometimes requires the march of a Zion's camp, or an arduous Hole in the Rock trek, or special classrooms like the settlements in northern Mexico, wherein special individuals were fashioned. Those episodes, however, had nothing to do with real estate but everything to do with our second estate!

Hence, in submitting knowingly and meekly to this plan, we cannot say to the Lord that we are willing to surrender but only on our terms. There are no conditions in unconditional surrender!

### Freedom to choose

Even with all of its interior consistency, however, the plan cannot bring true happiness to anyone whose life is grossly inconsistent with its standards. It cannot fully enfold him who is too worried about being taken in. It has no

place of honor for one too concerned with losing his place in the secular synagogue. (See John 12:42-43.)

Though the plan reflects a caring Father and a Savior, believers in the plan are not automatically immune to the consuming cares of the world.

The plan places a striking emphasis on present human freedom to choose. (See 2 Nephi 2:27.) Yet some of our present circumstances may reflect previous agreements, now forgotten, but once freely made.

The plan always points the way, but does not always smooth the way, since individual development requires an "opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11).

### **Intellectual and spiritual confirmation about plan**

The Lord will give us the needed intellectual and spiritual confirmation concerning His plan, but on His terms and in His own way.

"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 7:17).

Truly, of all the errors mortals could make, God's plan of salvation is the wrong thing to be wrong about!

No error could be more enormous or more everlasting in its consequences!

No wonder this Church and its people go to such great lengths and expense to share the fulness of the gospel concerning this plan.

No wonder the Lord wants the plan taught plainly and repetitively.

And why not? It is God's plan—not ours! And, given the unimpressive outcomes of man's plans to solve the world's problems, aren't we glad! Furthermore, of all the things about which we might converse, as Jacob wrote, "Why not speak of the atonement of Christ?" (Jacob 4:12). Why not, brothers and sisters? This event arches over all of human history, as a Redeeming God and Savior Son pressed onward with the great plan of happiness.

Yes, in the plan, God would have us be happy, but first we had to be free to choose.

God's gift to us of this moral agency tells us wonderful things about His beneficial and developmental purposes. Our abuse of that agency tells us awful things about ourselves!

Yet, on this mortal stage, we see great moments of mercy, stirring celebrations of compassion, striking selflessness, and quiet and constant heroism among people of all creeds and colors and cultures.

This should not surprise us. After all, whose spirit children are we? (See Hebrews 12:9.)

### **The school, the curriculum, the Schoolmaster**

Unsurprisingly, therefore, this mortal school produces some soaring triumphs but also a history filled with individual mistakes. But we should not blame the school, nor the curriculum! Least of all, the Schoolmaster! Furthermore, we dare not lecture Him on the plight of His students!

Meanwhile, brothers and sisters, no one ever promised us that discipleship in the last days would be a picnic in the park.

Former periods of stress can guide us. When the earlier coming of Jesus was imminent, signs abounded. Still, for some, there were "doubtings" (3 Nephi 8:4). But the faithful prevailed and were vindicated.

There were determined detractors then, mocking the faith of believers, briefly creating "a great uproar," even rejoicing over the seeming prospect that the faith of Christ's followers would be in vain. (See 3 Nephi 1:5-7.) It was not. Members kept the faith, and the faith kept them!

### **Reassurances today**

For today's spiritually attuned, the reassurances will be there, as with Elisha's young servant. Encircled by an outnumbering enemy, the young man

rightly sought reassurance from the prophet and seer, who told him, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings 6:16). But the young man could count, and, clearly, it did not look that way to him—until after the prophet's prayer in his behalf. Then, the young man's eyes were opened, and he saw the mountain filled with horses and chariots of fire. (See 2 Kings 6:17.)

All will be well now, as anciently, because the Lord's covenant keepers have His echoing assurance:

"And they shall be my people, and I will be their God:

"And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them:

"And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good" (Jeremiah 32:38–40).

I so testify and assure in apostolic authority and in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Benson

Elder Neal A. Maxwell, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder A. Theodore Tuttle, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. He will be followed by Sister Elaine Cannon, who was released this morning as general president of the Young Women.

## Elder A. Theodore Tuttle

### Covenants, ordinances, and service

I have served in past years as both a mission president and as a temple president. I have watched the young people as they have come to the missions in South America and come to the temple for their endowments and sealings.

I have seen those who were well prepared, and those who were not so well prepared for these blessings. But, most of all, I watched anxiously for those who were not prepared—those who did not come at all—and wondered why.

A few of them were from families where every effort had been made to prepare them for missionary service and for the blessings of the temple. Most of them, however, were from homes where they did not receive what was required to qualify them and to give them a desire to serve.

In order to prepare youth for missionary service and for the temple blessings, parents must have more in mind than schooling. They must have

more in mind than preparing for a career. They must have more in mind, really, than just to be a missionary—as though attendance was all that was required.

There are three words which must be kept in mind: *covenants*, *ordinances*, and *service*.

The training for covenants, for ordinances, and for service *belongs in the home*. If these are paramount in the minds of the parents, the youth will be prepared. And they will not, because of this, miss any essential training for their careers.

### A new challenge for parents

Fathers and mothers are under divine instruction to take care of their parental responsibilities. The things we have done in past years are not now sufficient to protect our children in these critical times. It has long been taught in this Church that the day will come when no one will be able to stand without an individual testimony of the divinity of this work. That day is here.