

Our beloved prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson, who presides at this and all sessions of the conference, has asked me to conduct.

We welcome you who are participating in the large audience assembled in the Tabernacle and in the overflow gathering in the nearby Assembly Hall, where Elders Gene R. Cook and H. Burke Peterson are seated on the stand. We also extend our greetings to those of you who are participating by radio, television, cable, or satellite transmission. We are grateful to the owners and operators of the stations who are broadcasting this conference.

We acknowledge the presence this morning of government, education, and civic leaders, and officers and members of the Church from many lands who have assembled to worship and to counsel together in this conference.

The Tabernacle Choir is providing the music for this session under the direction of Brothers Jerold Ottley and

Donald Ripplinger, with Brother Robert Cundick at the organ.

The choir opened these services by singing "The Morning Breaks," and will now sing "The Lord My Pasture Will Prepare," following which Elder Theodore M. Burton, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, will offer the invocation.

The choir sang "The Lord My Pasture Will Prepare."

Elder Theodore M. Burton offered the invocation.

The choir sang "I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes" without announcement.

President Monson

The Tabernacle Choir has just sung "I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes." President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will now be our first speaker.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

I add my word of welcome to all who are gathered in this great conference. It has veritably become a world conference. We now speak to congregations throughout North America and instantaneously reach to some across the seas. Hundreds of thousands are gathered this morning to hear the word of the Lord. I thank you for your faith and your desires, and seek the direction of the Holy Spirit.

"Lord, Increase our faith"

Let me tell you of an experience I had with one of our Area Presidents. We were in a land where, to our knowledge, there was not a member of the Church among the millions of that nation.

There was a man who knew of the Church and desired baptism. He had been a longtime student of the Bible.

He belonged to a Christian church but was not satisfied. The thought came into his mind that he should belong to a church that carried the name of the Savior. In an old encyclopedia in a public library, he found listed The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with headquarters in Salt Lake City. He wrote a letter of inquiry and received a response with literature. Other literature followed as he requested it.

When we met him he had read the Book of Mormon again and again. He had read the Doctrine and Covenants and other Church writings. With enthusiasm he had told his friends of his treasured find. He asked to be baptized.

We questioned him. He knew of the priesthood, its orders and its offices. He knew of the various ordinances and the procedures of our meetings.

Did he believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God? Oh, yes, he knew it to be true. He had read it. He had prayed about it and pondered. He had no doubt of its truth.

Did he believe Joseph Smith to be a prophet of God? Most assuredly. Again, he had studied and prayed. He was convinced of the reality of that glorious vision when God the Eternal Father and His Beloved Son, the resurrected Lord, appeared to the boy Joseph to usher in a new and final dispensation of gospel truth.

The priesthood had been restored with all its gifts and powers. He knew that. Our friend asked for baptism and hoped for the priesthood that he might teach and act with proper authority.

"But," we said, "if we baptize you and then leave, you will be left alone. While there are many Christians in your nation, and freedom of religion is guaranteed under its laws, there are severe restrictions concerning foreigners. There will be no one to teach you and help you. There will be no one on whom you can lean."

He responded, "God will teach me and help me, and He will be my friend and support."

I looked into the eyes of that good man and saw the light of faith. We baptized him under the authority of the holy priesthood. We confirmed him a member of the Church and bestowed upon him the Holy Ghost. We baptized his wife. We conferred upon him the Aaronic Priesthood and ordained him to the office of priest so that under proper direction they might have the sacrament.

We held a sacrament and testimony meeting with them. We embraced them and said good-bye to one another, and tears were in our eyes. They left to return to their home, and we left for responsibilities in other nations.

I shall never forget him. He is poor in the things of the world. But he is educated—a teacher by profession. I know little of his circumstances. But

this I know—when we talked with him, the fire of faith burned in his heart, and our own faith was quickened also.

As we traveled from that scene and there was time to meditate, I wished that faith of his kind was found more widely, both among us and among others. His example has provided a text for me. It is found in the fifth verse of the seventeenth chapter of Luke. Jesus had been teaching his disciples by precept and parable. "And the apostles said unto the Lord, *Increase our faith*" (italics added).

Forged letters

This is my prayer for all of us—"Lord, Increase our faith." Increase our faith to bridge the chasms of uncertainty and doubt. As most of you know, in the last four or five years we have passed through an interesting episode in the history of the Church. There came into our hands two letters that were seized upon by the media when we announced them. They were trumpeted across much of the world as documents that would challenge the authenticity of the Church. In announcing them we stated that they really had nothing to do with the essentials of our history. But some few of little faith, who seemingly are always quick to believe the negative, accepted as fact the pronouncements and predictions of the media. I recall a letter from an individual who asked that his name be taken from the records of the Church because he could no longer believe in a church that had to do with an experience with a salamander.

Now, as you know, these letters, together with other documents, have been acknowledged by their forger to be total frauds and part of an evil and devious design which culminated in the murder of two individuals.

I have wondered what those whose faith was shaken have thought since the forger confessed to his evil work.

However, I hasten to add, the vast majority of Church members, all but a very few, paid little attention and went forward with their faithful service, living by a conviction firmly grounded in that knowledge which comes by the power of the Holy Ghost. They knew then and they know now that God watches over this work, that Jesus Christ is the head of this Church, that it is true, and that happiness and growth come of following its precepts and teachings.

The Church's origin is divine

Out of this earlier episode has now arisen another phenomenon. It is described as the writing of a "new history" of the Church as distinguished from the "old history." It represents, among other things, an effort to ferret out every element of folk magic and the occult in the environment in which Joseph Smith lived to explain what he did and why.

I have no doubt there was folk magic practiced in those days. Without question there were superstitions and the superstitious. I suppose there was some of this in the days when the Savior walked the earth. There is even some in this age of so-called enlightenment. For instance, some hotels and business buildings skip the numbering of floor thirteen. Does this mean there is something wrong with the building? Of course not. Or with the builders? No.

Similarly, the fact that there were superstitions among the people in the days of Joseph Smith is no evidence whatever that the Church came of such superstition.

Seek the truth in faith

Joseph Smith himself wrote or dictated his history. It is his testimony of what occurred, and he sealed that testimony with his life. It is written in language clear and plain and unmistakable. From an ancient record he translated the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God. It is here for all to

see and handle and read. Those who have read with faith and inquired in prayer have come to a certain knowledge that it is true. The present effort of trying to find some other explanation for the organization of the Church, for the origin of the Book of Mormon, and for the priesthood with its keys and powers will be similar to other anti-Mormon fads which have come and blossomed and faded. Truth will prevail. A knowledge of that truth comes by effort and study, yes. But it comes primarily as a gift from God to those who seek in faith.

Church expansion a consequence of increased faith

My constant prayer in behalf of the entire Church is this: Lord, increase our faith to rise above the feeble detractors of this Thy great and holy work. Strengthen our will. Help us to build and expand Thy kingdom according to Thy great mandate, that this gospel may be preached in all the world as a witness unto all nations.

I have seen answers to that prayer. I have seen the miracle of the expansion of this cause and kingdom and can testify of it.

The fruits of faith in Asia

In 1960, only twenty-seven years ago, I was given an assignment by the First Presidency to work with the mission presidents, the missionaries, and the Saints in Asia. The Church was weak and small in that part of the earth. The seed had been planted in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea by faithful Latter-day Saints in military service. But it was tiny and unstable. We had no buildings of our own. We met as small groups in rented houses. In winter they were cold and uncomfortable. Converts came into the Church. But some, lacking faith, soon left. However, there remained a residual of strong and wonderful men and women who looked beyond the adversity of the moment. They found their strength in the

message, not in the facilities. They have remained faithful to this day, and their numbers have been added to by the tens and tens of thousands.

A few Sundays back we held a regional conference in Tokyo. The spacious hall was filled to capacity. There were almost as many present on that occasion as there are assembled in the Salt Lake Tabernacle this morning. The Spirit of the Lord was there. An attitude of faith filled that vast congregation. For me, who had known those days when we were weak and few in number, it was a miracle to behold, for which I give thanks to the Lord.

We had a similar experience in Hong Kong, where there are now four stakes of Zion.

Then in Seoul, Korea, my heart was touched as we entered the largest hall in that great city to find every seat taken by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and their invited guests. A magnificent choir of 320 voices opened with the strains "Oh, how lovely was the morning" ("Joseph Smith's First Prayer," *Hymns* [1985], no. 26). It was a moving expression of the first vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

I had known South Korea in its days of poverty and reconstruction following the terrible war. When first I went there, we had six missionaries in Seoul and two in Pusan. Some were ill with hepatitis. Today there are four thriving missions in that land, with some six hundred missionaries. Many of the missionaries are sons and daughters of Korea. They include bright and beautiful young women in whose hearts burns the light of faith. They include young men who leave schooling for a season in order to serve missions. These young men are under tremendous pressures because of military requirements as well as educational demands, but they have faith in their hearts.

When first I went to South Korea, there were two or three tiny branches. Today there are one hundred fifty local units of the Church, both wards and branches. Then it was a small, isolated

district of the Northern Far East Mission. We had no chapels. Today there are fourteen stakes with forty-seven chapels built and owned and another fifty-two under lease, with others under construction.

I felt a spirit in that congregation three weeks ago that touched me to the depths of my soul. I saw the sweet fruits of faith. I knew of the early struggles in establishing an unknown church. I knew of the poverty of the people. Now there is strength. There is an undreamed-of measure of prosperity. There is a warm spirit of fellowship. There are families of devoted husbands and wives and good and beautiful children.

These are people I love, and I love them because of their faith. They are intelligent and well educated. They are hardworking and progressive. They are humble and prayerful. They are an example to others across the world.

The power of faith

I say again, as did the Apostles to Jesus, "Lord, Increase our faith." Grant us faith to look beyond the problems of the moment to the miracles of the future. Give us faith to pay our tithes and offerings and put our trust in Thee, the Almighty, to open the windows of heaven as Thou hast promised. Give us faith to do what is right and let the consequence follow.

Grant us faith when storms of adversity beat us down and drive us to the ground. In seasons of sickness may our confidence wax strong in the powers of the priesthood. May we follow the counsel of James:

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

"And the *prayer of faith* shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (James 5:14-15; italics added).

He who will follow me in speaking, President Howard W. Hunter, is a shining example of the efficacy of such faith.

Lord, when we walk in the valley of the shadow of death, give us faith to smile through our tears, knowing that it is all part of the eternal plan of a loving Father, that as we cross the threshold from this life we enter another more glorious, and that through the atonement of the Son of God all shall rise from the grave and the faithful shall go on to exaltation.

Give us faith to pursue the work of redemption of the dead that Thine eternal purposes may be fulfilled in behalf of Thy sons and daughters of all generations.

Father, grant us faith to follow counsel in the little things that can mean so very much. Our President, he whom we sustain as prophet, has repeatedly, since he was called to this responsibility, asked us to read that other great witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, the Book of Mormon. Tens of thousands have now done so to their great blessing. They could testify, Sweet are the rewards of simple faith.

Lord, increase our faith in one another, and in ourselves, and in our capacity to do good and great things.

This, my brothers and sisters, is my prayer.

Elijah's faithful obedience

There is a simple and moving story in the book of 1 Kings. Permit me to read you a few lines:

"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be

dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

"And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying,

"Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.

"And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.

"So he [Elijah] *went and did* according unto the word of the Lord" (1 Kings 17:1-5; italics added).

There was no argument. There was no discussion. There was no rationalizing on the part of Elijah. He simply "*went and did.*"

Our greatest need

Father, increase our faith. Of all our needs, I think the greatest is an increase in faith. And so, dear Father, increase our faith in Thee, and in Thy Beloved Son, in Thy great eternal work, in ourselves as Thy children, and in our capacity to go and do according to Thy will, and Thy precepts, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has addressed us.

The Tabernacle Choir will now sing "Lovely Appear," following which President Howard W. Hunter, Acting President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will address us.

The choir sang "Lovely Appear."

President Howard W. Hunter

Forgive me if I remain seated while I present these few remarks. It is not by choice that I speak from a wheel-

chair. I notice that the rest of you seem to enjoy the conference sitting down, so I will follow your example.