

SECOND DAY MORNING SESSION

The fourth session of the 160th Annual General Conference commenced at 10:00 A.M. on Sunday, April 1, 1990. President Ezra Taft Benson presided, and President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted this session.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music, with Jerold Ottley and Donald Ripplinger conducting and John Longhurst at the organ.

Before the session, the choir sang "Awake and Arise" without announcement.

President Hinckley opened the meeting with the following remarks:

President Gordon B. Hinckley

We welcome you this Sabbath morning from the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Utah, to the fourth general session of the 160th annual conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Our beloved prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson, has asked that I conduct this meeting.

We acknowledge the large audience assembled in the Tabernacle and in the overflow gathering in the nearby Assembly Hall, where Elders David B. Haight, William R. Bradford, and Waldo P. Call

are seated on the stand. We extend our greetings to those of you participating by radio, television, cable, or satellite transmission. We are grateful to the owners and operators of the stations that are broadcasting this conference.

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

The Tabernacle Choir under the direction of Brothers Jerold Ottley and Donald Ripplinger, with Brother John Longhurst at the organ, opened these services by singing "Awake and Arise." They will now sing "Oh, May My Soul Commune with Thee," following which Elder John R. Lasater of the Seventy will offer the invocation.

The choir sang "Oh, May My Soul Commune with Thee."

Elder John R. Lasater offered the invocation.

President Hinckley

President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our first speaker this morning.

President Thomas S. Monson

The greatest of the kingdom

During the Galilean ministry of our Lord and Savior, the disciples came unto Him, saying:

"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

"And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as

little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

"And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:1-6).

The many faces of child abuse

Recently, as I read the daily newspaper, my thoughts turned to this passage and the firm candor of the Savior's declaration. In one column of the newspaper I read of a custody battle between the mother and father of a child. Accusations were made, threats hurled, and anger displayed as parents moved here and there on the international scene with the child spirited away from one continent to another.

A second story told of a twelve-year-old lad who was beaten and set on fire because he refused a neighborhood bully's order to take drugs. Hospitalized, his condition remains critical.

Still a third report told of a father's sexual molestation of his small child.

These are *reported* cases of child abuse. There are many more never reported but equally as serious. A physician revealed to me the large number of children who are brought to the emergency rooms of local hospitals in your city and mine. In many cases guilty parents provide fanciful accounts of the child falling from his high chair or stumbling over a toy and striking his head. Altogether too frequently it is discovered that the parent was the abuser and the innocent child the victim. Shame on the perpetrators of such vile deeds. God will hold such strictly accountable for their actions.

Children are precious to the Lord

President Ezra Taft Benson is one who exemplifies a true love for these little ones. To see the tiny tots gather at his side, extend a small hand to be held in his or to kiss his cheek, is to see the love adults should have for these children. No one in the presence of President Benson refers to a child as a "kid." His correction for such a remark is sure and to the point. A visiting ambassador from another nation errantly made this slip. He was corrected with love.

When we realize just how precious children are, we will not find it difficult

to follow the pattern of the Master in our association with them. Not long ago, a sweet scene took place at the Salt Lake Temple. Children, who had been ever so tenderly cared for by faithful workers in the temple nursery, were now leaving in the arms of their mothers and fathers. One child turned to the lovely women who had been so kind to the children and, with a wave of her arm, spoke the feelings of her heart as she exclaimed, "Goodnight, angels."

The poet described a child so recently with its Heavenly Father as "a sweet new blossom of humanity, fresh fallen from God's own home to flower on earth."

Who among us has not praised God and marveled at His powers when an infant is held in one's arms? That tiny hand, so small yet so perfect, instantly becomes the topic of conversation. No one can resist placing his little finger in the clutching hand of an infant. A smile comes to the lips, a certain glow to the eyes, and one appreciates the tender feelings which prompted the poet to pen the lines:

Our birth is but a sleep and a
forgetting;
The soul that rises with us, our life's
star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we
come
From God, who is our home.
[William Wordsworth, "Ode:
Intimations of Immortality from
Recollections of Early Childhood"]

When the disciples of Jesus attempted to restrain the children from approaching the Lord, He declared:

"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

"And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:14-16).

What a magnificent pattern for us to follow.

We can bless the lives of children

My heart burned warmly within me when the First Presidency approved the allocation of a substantial sum from your special fast-offering contributions to join with those funds from Rotary International that polio vaccine might be provided and the children living in Kenya immunized against this vicious crippler and killer of children.

I thank God for the work of our doctors who leave for a time their own private practices and journey to distant lands to minister to children. Cleft palates and other deformities which would leave a child impaired physically and damaged psychologically are skillfully repaired. Despair yields to hope. Gratitude replaces grief. These children can now look in the mirror and marvel at a miracle in their own lives.

In a recent meeting, I told of a dentist in my ward who each year visits the Philippine Islands to work his skills without compensation to provide corrective dentistry for children. Smiles are restored, spirits lifted, and futures enhanced. I did not know the daughter of this dentist was in the congregation to which I was speaking. At the conclusion of my remarks, she came forward and, with a broad smile of proper pride, said, "You have been speaking of my father. How I love him and what he is doing for children!"

In the faraway islands of the Pacific, hundreds who were near-blind now see because a missionary said to his physician brother-in-law, "Leave your wealthy clientele and the comforts of your palatial home and come to these special children of God who need your skills and need them now." The ophthalmologist responded without a backward glance. Today he comments quietly that this visit was the best service he ever rendered and

the peace which came to his heart the greatest blessing of his life.

Tears come easily to me when I read of a father who has donated one of his own kidneys in the hope that his son might have a more abundant life. I drop to my knees at night and add my prayer of faith in behalf of a mother in our community who journeyed to Chicago that she might provide part of her liver to her daughter in a delicate and potentially life-threatening surgery. She, who already had gone down into the valley of the shadow of death to bring forth this child into mortality, again put her hand in the hand of God and placed her own life in jeopardy for her child. Never a complaint, but ever a willing heart and a prayer of faith.

Elder Russell M. Nelson, upon returning from Romania, shared with us the pitiable plight of orphan children in that land—perhaps thirty thousand in the city of Bucharest alone. He visited one such orphanage and arranged that the Church might provide vaccine, medical dressings, and other urgently needed supplies. Certain couples will be identified and called to fill special missions to these children. I can think of no more Christ-like service than to hold a motherless child in one's arms or to take a fatherless boy by the hand.

We need not be called to missionary service, however, in order to bless the lives of children. Our opportunities are limitless. They are everywhere to be found—sometimes very close to home.

How children bless our lives

Last summer I received a letter from a woman who has emerged from a long period of Church inactivity. She is ever so anxious for her husband, who as yet is not a member of the Church, to share the joy she now feels.

She wrote of a trip which she, her husband, and their three sons made from the family home to Grandmother's home in Idaho. While driving through Salt Lake City, they were attracted by the message which appeared on a bill-

board. The message invited them to visit Temple Square. Bob, the nonmember husband, made the suggestion that a visit would be pleasant. The family entered the visitors' center, and Father took two sons up a ramp that one called "the ramp to heaven." Mother and three-year-old Tyler were a bit behind the others, they having paused to appreciate the beautiful paintings which adorned the walls. As they walked toward the magnificent sculpture of Thorvaldsen's *Christus*, tiny Tyler bolted from his mother and ran to the base of the *Christus*, while exclaiming, "It's Jesus! It's Jesus!" As Mother attempted to restrain her son, Tyler looked back toward her and his father and said, "Don't worry. He likes children."

After departing the center and again making their way along the freeway toward Grandmother's, Tyler moved to the front seat next to his father. Dad asked him what he liked best about their adventure on Temple Square. Tyler smiled up at him and said, "Jesus."

"How do you know that Jesus likes you, Tyler?"

Tyler, with a most serious expression on his face, looked up at his father's eyes and answered, "Dad, didn't you see his face?" Nothing else needed to be said.

As I read this account, I thought of the statement from the book of Isaiah: "And a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6).

The words of a Primary hymn express the feelings of a child's heart:

Tell me the stories of Jesus I love to hear,
 Things I would ask him to tell me if he were here.
 Scenes by the wayside, tales of the sea,
 Stories of Jesus, tell them to me.
 Oh, let me hear how the children stood round his knee.
 I shall imagine his blessings resting on me;
 Words full of kindness, deeds full of grace,
 All in the lovelight of Jesus' face.
 ["Tell Me the Stories of Jesus,"
Children's Songbook (1989), p. 57]

Blessing the Nephite children

I know of no more touching passage in scripture than the account of the Savior blessing the children, as recorded in 3 Nephi. The Master spoke movingly to the vast multitude of men, women, and children. Then, responding to their faith and the desire that He tarry longer, He invited them to bring to Him their lame, their blind, and their sick, that He might heal them. With joy they accepted His invitation. The record reveals that "he did heal them every one" (3 Nephi 17:9). There followed His mighty prayer to His Father. The multitude bore record: "The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father" (17:16).

Concluding this magnificent event, Jesus "wept, . . . and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them. . . .

"And he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones.

"And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven . . . ; and they came down and encircled those little ones . . . ; and the angels did minister unto them" (17:21, 23-24).

Over and over in my mind I pondered the phrase, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mark 10:15).

Thomas Michael Wilson

One who fulfilled in his life this admonition of the Savior was a missionary, Thomas Michael Wilson. He is the son of Willie and Julia Wilson, Route 2, Box 12, Lafayette, Alabama. Elder Wilson completed his earthly mission on January 13, 1990. When he was but a teenager, and he and his family were not yet members of the Church, he was stricken with cancer, followed by painful radiation therapy, and then blessed remission. This

illness caused his family to realize that not only is life precious but that it can also be short. The family began to look to religion to help them through this time of tribulation. Subsequently they were introduced to the Church and baptized. After accepting the gospel, young Brother Wilson yearned for the opportunity of being a missionary. A mission call came for him to serve in the Utah Salt Lake City Mission. What a privilege to represent the family and the Lord as a missionary!

Elder Wilson's missionary companions described his faith as like that of a child—unquestioning, undeviating, unyielding. He was an example to all. After eleven months, illness returned. Bone cancer now required the amputation of his arm and shoulder. Yet he persisted in his missionary labors.

Elder Wilson's courage and consuming desire to remain on his mission so touched his nonmember father that he investigated the teachings of the Church and also became a member.

An anonymous caller brought to my attention Elder Wilson's plight. She said she didn't want to leave her name and indicated she'd never before called a General Authority. However, she said, "You don't often meet someone of the caliber of Elder Wilson."

I learned that an investigator whom Elder Wilson had taught was baptized at the baptistry on Temple Square but then wanted to be confirmed by Elder Wilson, whom she respected so much. She, with a few others, journeyed to Elder Wilson's bedside in the hospital. There, with his remaining hand resting upon her head, Elder Wilson confirmed her a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Elder Wilson continued month after month his precious but painful service as a missionary. Blessings were given; prayers were offered. The spirit of his fellow missionaries soared. Their hearts were full. They lived closer to God.

Elder Wilson's physical condition deteriorated. The end drew near. He was to return home. He asked to serve but one additional month. What a month this

was! Like a child trusting implicitly its parents, Elder Wilson put his trust in God. He whom Thomas Michael Wilson silently trusted opened the windows of heaven and abundantly blessed him. His parents, Willie and Julia Wilson, and his brother Tony came to Salt Lake City to help their son and brother home to Alabama. However, there was yet a prayed-for, a yearned-for, blessing to be bestowed. The family invited me to come with them to the Jordan River Temple, where those sacred ordinances which bind families for eternity, as well as for time, were performed.

I said good-bye to the Wilson family. I can see Elder Wilson yet as he thanked me for being with him and his loved ones. He said, "It doesn't matter what happens to us in this life as long as we have the gospel of Jesus Christ and live it." What courage. What confidence. What love. The Wilson family made the long trek home to Lafayette, where Elder Thomas Michael Wilson slipped from here to eternity.

President Kevin K. Meadows, Elder Wilson's branch president, presided at the funeral services. The words of his subsequent letter to me I share with you today: "On the day of the funeral, I took the family aside and expressed to them, President Monson, the sentiments you sent to me. I reminded them of what Elder Wilson had told you that day in the temple, that it did not matter whether he taught the gospel on this or the other side of the veil, so long as he could teach the gospel. I gave to them the inspiration you provided from the writings of President Joseph F. Smith—that Elder Wilson had completed his earthly mission and that he, as all 'faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption, through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead' [D&C 138:57]. The spirit bore record that this was the case. Elder Thomas Michael Wilson was buried with his missionary name tag in place."

When Elder Wilson's mother and his father visit that rural cemetery and place flowers of remembrance on the grave of their son, I feel certain they will remember the day he was born, the pride they felt, and the genuine joy that was theirs. This tiny child they will remember became the mighty man who later brought to them the opportunity to achieve celestial glory. Perhaps on these pilgrimages, when emotions are close to the surface and tears cannot be restrained, they will again thank God for their missionary son, who never lost the faith of a child, and then ponder deep within their hearts the Master's words, "And a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6).

Peace will then be their blessing. It will be our blessing, also, as we remem-

ber and follow the Prince of Peace. That we may do so is my sincere prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "The Morning Breaks, the Shadows Flee" without announcement.

President Hinckley

President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has addressed us, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "The Morning Breaks, the Shadows Flee."

President Howard W. Hunter, President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will now address us.

President Howard W. Hunter

God requires personal commitment

As I think of the blessings God has given us and the many beauties of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I am aware that along the way we are asked to make certain contributions in return, contributions of time or of money or of other resources. These are all valued and all necessary, but they do not constitute our full offering to God. Ultimately, what our Father in Heaven will require of us is more than a contribution; it is a total commitment, a complete devotion, all that we are and all that we can be.

Please understand that I do not speak only of a commitment to the Church and its activities, although that always needs to be strengthened. No, I speak more specifically of a commitment that is shown in our individual behavior, in our personal integrity, in our loyalty to home and family and community, as well as to the Church. Of course, all of these loyalties are interrelated and closely linked because it is the teaching and example of the Lord Jesus Christ that shapes our behavior and forms our char-

acter in all areas of our life—personally, within the home, in our professions and community life, as well as in our devotion to the Church that bears his name.

The Lord is the standard

If we can pattern our life after the Master, and take his teachings and example as the supreme pattern for our own, we will not find it difficult to be consistent and loyal in every walk of life, for we will be committed to a single, sacred standard of conduct and belief. Whether at home or in the marketplace, whether at school or long after school is behind us, whether we are acting totally alone or in concert with a host of other people, our course will be clear and our standards will be obvious. We will have determined, as the Prophet Alma said, "to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that [we] may be in, even until death" (Mosiah 18:9).

This loyalty obviously includes support of the institutional church, but one of the purposes of that church is to alter