

speak of us by the name of this book, they will compliment us, if we will live worthy of the name, remembering that in a very real sense *Mormonism* must mean that greater good which the Lord Jesus Christ exemplified. I so pray in His holy name, even the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" without announcement.

Elder David B. Haight

Importance of temples

Temples are the most sacred places of worship on earth where sacred ordinances are performed—ordinances which pertain to salvation and exaltation in the kingdom of God. Each one is literally a house of the Lord—a place where He and His spirit may dwell, where He may come or send others to confer priesthood blessings and to give revelation to His people.

Temples built especially to the Lord have been erected in all ages. Moses built a tabernacle in the wilderness for the children of Israel. Solomon built a magnificent temple in Jerusalem. The Nephites built sacred temples. Joseph Smith built houses of the Lord in Kirtland and Nauvoo, and succeeding prophets have built temples throughout the world. These have all been initiated and built under the direction and revelation of God.

Without revelation, temples can neither be built nor properly used. They are one of the evidences of the divinity of our Lord's true gospel. In our day, the Lord has said, "How shall your washings be acceptable unto me, except ye perform them in a house which you have built to my name . . . that . . . ordinances might be revealed which had been hid from . . . the world" (D&C 124:37–38).

President Monson

President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has addressed us, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty."

Elder David B. Haight, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will be our next speaker.

Importance of our premortal life

Latter-day Saints should be eternally grateful for the revealed knowledge given anciently but reaffirmed in even greater plainness in our dispensation, and which was known by our Lord's Apostle, Peter, when he prophesied that before the second coming of Christ there would be a "restitution of all things" spoken of by God (see Acts 3:21; see also D&C 121:26–32). One of these restored doctrines, premortality or preexistence, should give us a greater appreciation for ourselves and the work assigned us, for each one of us existed as a spirit entity before we were born on this earth.

Most of us have wondered about what occurred in the premortal world and how it relates to our existence here. We should be acquainted with the truth that knowledge of the premortal life was restored that we might fulfill our responsibilities as children of God.

The Lord has revealed that a grand council was held in that preearth world where we exercised our agency regarding the plans presented. The major proposition in the accepted plan of salvation provided for an earth life where each person could work out his eternal salvation.

John A. Widtsoe provides insight to an earth-life responsibility made in that premortal world which is of great importance. He highlights a contractual agreement we made concerning the

eternal welfare of all of the sons and daughters of the Eternal Father:

"In our preexistent state, in the day of the great council, we made a[n] . . . agreement with the Almighty. The Lord proposed a plan. . . . We accepted it. Since the plan is intended for all men, we became parties to the salvation of every person under that plan. We agreed, right then and there, to be not only saviors for ourselves but . . . saviors for the whole human family. We went into a partnership with the Lord. The working out of the plan became then not merely the Father's work, and the Savior's work, but also our work. The least of us, the humblest, is in partnership with the Almighty in achieving the purpose of the eternal plan of salvation."

Elder Widtsoe continues:

"That places us in a very responsible attitude towards the human race. By that doctrine, with the Lord at the head, we become saviors on Mount Zion, all committed to the great plan of offering salvation to the untold numbers of spirits. To do this is the Lord's self-imposed duty, this great labor his highest glory. Likewise, it is man's duty, self-imposed, his pleasure and joy, his labor, and ultimately his glory" ("The Worth of Souls," *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, Oct. 1934, p. 189).

Responsibility to redeem the dead

Latter-day Saints are a chosen people, so appointed in the premortal world, to be in partnership with the Lord for the salvation of the living and the dead. The First Presidency has announced that one of the major responsibilities of the Church, and therefore of its members, is to redeem the dead.

We learn by revelation from the Prophet Joseph Smith that "these . . . principles in relation to the dead and the living . . . cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation. . . .

"For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect" (D&C 128:15, 18; see also Hebrews 11:39-40).

It would be difficult for one to find stronger language on a requirement to receive exaltation in the celestial kingdom.

The mission of Elijah

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery had received the Melchizedek Priesthood under the hands of Peter, James, and John; however, it was necessary for the prophet Elijah to restore special keys, "in order that all the ordinances may be attended to in righteousness" (*History of the Church*, 4:211). Thus, the sealing powers and ordinances necessary for the dead as well as the living were to be restored. This was accomplished by Elijah's visit to Joseph and Oliver on April 3, 1836, in the Kirtland Temple.

Elijah's mission was to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6). The turning of the hearts of the fathers in the spirit world to the children on earth provides for the gathering of ancestral data of their deceased fathers in order that ordinances might be performed in the temples of the Lord. Thus, the living having their hearts turned to their fathers is in accordance with the premortal agreement we made before the earth was formed.

Elijah's visit to the Kirtland Temple is attested by several truths.

First, no one else has claimed that the prophecy regarding Elijah's coming in the last days has been fulfilled.

Second, the testimony of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery stands unassailable—they could not turn the hearts of the children to the fathers except by the power sent by God.

Third, neither did they have the power to persuade millions of people to turn their attention to their deceased fathers. Remarkable indeed is the fact that organized efforts to gather genea-

logical information began after Elijah came in 1836. In America, the New England Historical and Genealogical Society was organized in 1844, and the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society in 1869, for the purpose of gathering genealogy. What is known as the "Spirit of Elijah" has influenced non-members as well as members of the Church in this vital activity. The micro-filming of thousands of records is continuing on a large scale throughout the world. (See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-56], 2:122-28).

The Jewish people have looked forward to the return to the earth of Elijah as promised by Malachi. Each year in the spring the Paschal feast is observed in many Jewish homes, at which time a door is opened so that Elijah might come in and sit at the feast.

"It was . . . on the third day of April, 1836," said President Joseph Fielding Smith, "that the [Jewish people], in their homes at the Paschal feast, opened their doors for Elijah to enter. [However,] on that very day Elijah did enter—not in the home of the Jews to partake of the Passover with them, but he appeared in the House of the Lord . . . in Kirtland, and there bestowed his keys" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1936, p. 75).

Temple building

The Prophet Joseph said the main object of the "gathering [of] the Jews, or the people of God in any age of the world . . . was to build unto the Lord a house whereby He could reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], pp. 307-8).

Bible prophecies indicate that in the last dispensation of the gospel, there would be a restoration of all

of the principles and practices of former dispensations, which includes temple building and the performing of ordinances therein (see Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2; Acts 3:19-21; Ephesians 1:9-10).

A latter-day Apostle wrote, "The history of Temples teaches us that the people of God have been strong, or weak, in proportion to the faithfulness with which they have attended to their sanctuaries" (Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Doctrine and Covenants Commentary* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1951], p. 612).

Seven blessings of temple service

We would do well to follow the example of our beloved prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson. He and his sweet companion, Flora, have set aside time each Friday to regularly attend the house of the Lord, and they would join with me here this morning in declaring that members of the Church who absent themselves from temple attendance, where it is possible for them to attend, are denying themselves rich blessings.

"There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—

"And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated" (D&C 130:20-21).

"Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.

"And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come" (D&C 130:18-19).

With these two scriptures in mind, I exhort all members for a renewed commitment in strengthening their faith and progression to exaltation in the celestial kingdom—

First, by fulfilling our responsibility to our dead.

The Prophet Joseph said, "The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us, is to seek after our dead" (*Times and Seasons*, 5:616).

I am indebted to my kindred dead who made it possible for me to live in this dispensation and to have the privilege of being a member of the "only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth" (D&C 1:30).

Our opportunities are twofold: to do genealogical research and to perform temple work. There may be a time when we may not be able to do the research required, but this should not deter us from receiving the blessings of temple attendance. With forty-four functioning temples located in various parts of the world, the privilege of participating in temple activity is becoming more and more available. Should you or I neglect either of these responsibilities?

Second, by being "endowed with power from on high" (D&C 38:32).

The environment in the temple is intended to provide the worthy member of the Church with the power of enlightenment, of testimony, and of understanding. The temple endowment gives knowledge that, when acted upon, provides strength and conviction of truth.

Third, by finding a place of refuge and peace (see D&C 124:36).

The moment we step into the house of the Lord, the atmosphere changes from the worldly to the heavenly, where respite from the normal activities of life is found, and where peace of mind and spirit is received. It is a refuge from the ills of life and a protection from the temptations that are contrary to our spiritual well-being. We are told that "he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come" (D&C 59:23).

Fourth, by receiving revelation.

John A. Widtsoe wrote: "I believe that the busy person on the farm, in the shop, in the office, or in the household, who has his worries and troubles, can solve his problems better and more quickly in the house of the Lord than

anywhere else. If he will . . . [do] the temple work for himself and for his dead, he will confer a mighty blessing upon those who have gone before, and . . . a blessing will come to him, for at the most unexpected moments, in or out of the temple will come to him, as a revelation, the solution of the problems that vex his life. That is the gift that comes to those who enter the temple properly" ("Temple Worship," *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, Apr. 1921, pp. 63-64).

Revelation also comes in receiving greater understanding of the endowment as one seeks to comprehend its meaning.

Fifth, by giving genealogical and temple service.

The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote, "Those Saints who neglect it in behalf of their deceased relatives, do it at the peril of their own salvation" (*History of the Church*, 4:426).

Sixth, by becoming saviors on Mount Zion.

The Prophet Joseph wrote: "But how are they to become saviors on Mount Zion? By building their temples, . . . and receiving all the ordinances, . . . ordinations and sealing powers upon their [own] heads, [and] in behalf of all their progenitors who are dead, and redeem them that they may come forth in the first resurrection and be exalted to thrones of glory with them; and herein is the chain that binds the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, which fulfills the mission of Elijah" (*History of the Church*, 6:184).

And seventh, by qualifying to see and understand God in the house of the Lord.

At Kirtland, the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph:

"And inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it;

"Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God" (D&C 97:15-16).

It is true that some have actually seen the Savior, but when one consults

the dictionary, he learns that there are many other meanings of the word *see*, such as coming to know Him, discerning Him, recognizing Him and His work, perceiving His importance, or coming to understand Him.

Such heavenly enlightenment and blessings are available to each of us.

God our Father lives, as does His Son, Jesus the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. I am a grateful recipient of His healing power and love. This is His work. I so testify in His holy name, amen.

The choir sang "Blessed Are the Men Who Fear Him" without announcement.

President Monson

We have just heard from Elder David B. Haight of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, followed by the choir singing "Blessed Are the Men Who Fear Him."

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "How Firm a Foundation," following which we shall hear from Elder James M. Paramore, a member of the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation sang "How Firm a Foundation."

Elder James M. Paramore

My beloved brothers and sisters, I love you so much and I seek an interest in your faith and prayers today as I speak a few words to you. Several weeks ago I met a wonderful man while traveling to Texas. May I share with you a letter that I have written to him.

Witnesses of the Lord

Dear Ken, I feel impressed to write you following our long discussion a few weeks ago on the airplane. I hope you have received my letters and the materials about the Church. I have thought of you so often and how anxious you were to learn all you could about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I felt I would like to share some thoughts today about the many witnesses of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and His mission to bless all mankind. Because He is the central figure of the life on this earth, every possible opportunity should be taken to understand Him, His purposes, and the witnesses that can bring us to Him. It seems that nothing could be more important to this

world and to each of us than to know that.

You know, Ken, each Christmas we sing a song with great feeling and gusto, "Joy to the world, the Lord [will] come; Let earth receive her King! Let ev'ry heart prepare him room, And Saints and angels sing" (*Hymns*, no. 201). These immortal, almost sacred words state that He will come. But, Ken, He *has* come. And it is about His coming—many times—and the witnesses thereof that I would like to write today.

God, our Father, has indeed established a plan for this earth and for all of us. Jesus Christ was central to that plan. Christ would come to earth, give of Himself to people every day, overcome the world, establish His ways for others to follow, and then take upon Himself the sins of the world in Gethsemane, and then be raised from the tomb to live again and tell us that we would live. He would give to the world hope and eternal perspectives. He would offer the way, the truth, and the light by which it could be done. His message would illuminate every human aspiration, every hope and desire.