

The choir will now sing "O Thou, Before the World Began," following which Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi of the Seventy, who is president of the Tokyo Temple, will offer the invocation.

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### President Hinckley

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

## President Thomas S. Monson

This year, 1997, commemorates the 150th anniversary since the pioneers, under the inspired leadership of Brigham Young, entered the valley of the Great Salt Lake and proclaimed: "This is the right place. Drive on."<sup>1</sup> Much will be said at this conference concerning that epochal event, and thanks will be given to God for His watchful care and guidance.

### Tribute to "other pioneers"

On this beautiful Sabbath morning I wish to make a few remarks concerning "other pioneers" who preceded that trek. In doing so, I pause and ponder the dictionary definition of the word *pioneer*: "one who goes before, [showing] others [the way] to follow."<sup>2</sup>

### Pioneers from the Bible

Let us turn back the clock of time and journey to other places, that we might review several who I feel meet the high standard of the word *pioneer*.

Such a one was Moses. Raised in Pharaoh's court and learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, he became mighty in words and deeds. One cannot separate Moses, the great lawgiver, from the tablets of stone provided him by God and on which were written the Ten Commandments. They were binding then; they are binding now.

Moses endured constant frustration as some of his trusted followers returned to their previous ways. Though he was disappointed in their actions, yet he loved them and led them, even the children of Israel, from their Egyptian bondage. Certainly Moses qualifies as a pioneer.

Another who qualifies is Ruth, who forsook her people, her kindred, and her country in order to accompany her mother-in-law, Naomi—worshipping Jehovah in His land and adopting the ways of His people. How very important was Ruth's obedience to Naomi and the resulting marriage to Boaz by which Ruth—the foreigner and a Moabite convert—became a great-grandmother of David and therefore an ancestress of Jesus Christ. The book of the Holy Bible that bears her name contains language poetic in style, reflective of her spirit of determination and courage.

"And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

"Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."<sup>3</sup>

Yes, Ruth, precious Ruth, was a pioneer.

Other faithful women also qualify, such as Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary Magdalene; Esther; and Elisabeth. Let us not overlook Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, nor fail to include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and some from a later period.

We remember John the Baptist. His clothing was simple, his life spartan, his message brief: faith, repentance, baptism by immersion, and the bestowal of the Holy Ghost by an authority greater than that possessed by himself. He declared, "I am not the Christ, but . . . I am sent before him."<sup>4</sup> "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh . . . : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."<sup>5</sup>

The River Jordan marked the historic meeting place when Jesus came down from Galilee to be baptized of John. At first John pleaded with the Master, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?"<sup>6</sup> Came the response: "It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. . . ."

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

"And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."<sup>7</sup>

John freely declared and taught, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."<sup>8</sup>

Of John the Lord declared, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."<sup>9</sup> Like so many other pioneers through the annals of history, John wore the martyr's crown.

### Jesus' Apostles

Many who were pioneers in spirit and action were called by Jesus to be His Apostles. Much could be told of each.

Peter was among the first of Jesus' disciples. Peter the fisherman, in response to a divine call, laid aside his nets and hearkened to the Master's declaration: Come "follow me, and I will make you [a fisher] of men."<sup>10</sup> I never think of Peter without admiring his testimony of the Lord: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."<sup>11</sup>

John the Beloved is the only one of the Twelve recorded as being at the Crucifixion of Christ. From the cruel cross, Jesus uttered the magnificent charge to John, referring to His mother, Mary: "Behold thy mother,"<sup>12</sup> and to Mary, "Behold thy son."<sup>13</sup>

The Apostles went before, showing others the way to follow. They were pioneers.

### The great reformers

History records, however, that most men did not come unto Christ, nor did they follow the way He taught. Crucified was the Lord, slain were most of the Apostles, rejected was the truth. The bright sunlight of enlightenment slipped away, and the lengthening shadows of a black night enshrouded the earth.

Generations before, Isaiah had prophesied, "Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people."<sup>14</sup> Amos had foretold of a famine in the land, "not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."<sup>15</sup> The dark ages of history seemed never to end. Would no heavenly messengers make their appearance?

In due time honest men with yearning hearts, at the peril of their very lives, attempted to establish points of reference, that they might find the true way. The day of the Reformation was dawning, but the path ahead was difficult. Persecutions would be severe, personal sacrifice overwhelming, and the cost beyond calculation. The reformers were pioneers, blazing wilderness trails in a desperate search for those lost points of

reference which, they felt, when found would lead mankind back to the truth Jesus taught.

John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, Jan Hus, Zwingli, Knox, Calvin, and Tyndale all pioneered the period of the Reformation. Significant was the declaration of Tyndale to his critics: "I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the scripture than thou doest."<sup>16</sup>

Such were the teachings and lives of the great reformers. Their deeds were heroic, their contributions many, their sacrifices great—but they did not restore the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Of the reformers, one could ask: "Was their sacrifice in vain? Was their struggle futile?" I answer with a reasoned "no." The Holy Bible was now within the grasp of the people. Each person could better find his or her way. Oh, if only all could read and all could understand! But some could read, and others could hear, and all had access to God through prayer.

### Joseph Smith

The long-awaited day of restoration did indeed come. But let us review that significant event in the history of the world by recalling the testimony of the plowboy who became a prophet, the witness who was there—even Joseph Smith.

Describing his experience, Joseph said:

"I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, . . . *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*"<sup>17</sup>

"At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. . . .

". . . I retired to the woods to make the attempt. It was on the morning of a

beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty. . . .

". . . I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. . . .

". . . I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

". . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*"<sup>18</sup>

The Father and the Son, Jesus Christ, had appeared to Joseph Smith. The morning of the dispensation of the fulness of times had come, dispelling the darkness of the long generations of spiritual night.

Volumes have been written concerning the life and accomplishments of Joseph Smith, but for our purposes here today perhaps a highlight or two will suffice: He was visited by the angel Moroni. He translated, from the precious plates to which he was directed, the Book of Mormon, with its new witness of Christ to all the world. He was the instrument in the hands of the Lord through whom came mighty revelations pertaining to the establishment of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the course of his ministry he was visited by John the Baptist, Moses, Elijah, Peter, James, and John, that the restoration of all things might be accomplished. He endured persecution; he suffered grievously, as did his followers. He trusted in God. He was true to his prophetic calling. He commenced a marvelous missionary effort to the entire world, which today brings light and truth to the souls of mankind. At length, Joseph Smith died the martyr's death, as did his brother Hyrum.

Joseph Smith was a pioneer indeed.

### The ultimate pioneer—Jesus Christ

Turning the pages of scriptural history from beginning to end, we learn of the ultimate pioneer—even Jesus Christ. His birth was foretold by the prophets of old; His entry upon the stage of life was announced by an angel. His life and His ministry have transformed the world.

With the birth of the babe in Bethlehem, there emerged a great endowment, a power stronger than weapons, a wealth more lasting than the coins of Caesar. This child was to be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Promised Messiah, even Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Born in a stable, cradled in a manger, He came forth from heaven to live on earth as mortal man and to establish the kingdom of God. During His earthly ministry, He taught men the higher law. His glorious gospel reshaped the thinking of the world. He blessed the sick. He caused the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear. He even raised the dead to life.

One sentence from the book of Acts speaks volumes: Jesus “went about doing good, . . . for God was with him.”<sup>19</sup>

He taught us to pray: “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”<sup>20</sup>

In the garden known as Gethsemane, where His suffering was so great that blood came from His pores, He pleaded as He prayed, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”<sup>21</sup>

He taught us to serve: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”<sup>22</sup>

He taught us to forgive: “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.”<sup>23</sup>

He taught us to love: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,

and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”<sup>24</sup>

Like the true pioneer He was, He invited, “Come, follow me.”<sup>25</sup>

Let us turn to Capernaum. There Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came to the Master, saying, “My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.”<sup>26</sup> Then came the news from the ruler’s house: “Thy daughter is dead.”<sup>27</sup>

Christ responded, “Be not afraid, only believe.”<sup>28</sup> He came to the house, passed by the mourners, and said to them: “Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn,”<sup>29</sup> knowing that she was dead. “He . . . put them all out. . . . And he took [her] by the hand, and said unto her, . . . Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. . . . And they were astonished.”<sup>30</sup>

It is emotionally draining for me to recount the events leading up to the Crucifixion of the Master. I cringe when I read the words of Pilate responding to cries of the throng: “Crucify him. . . . Crucify him.”<sup>31</sup> Pilate “took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.”<sup>32</sup> Jesus was mocked. He was spit upon and a crown of thorns placed upon His head. He was given vinegar to drink. They crucified Him.

His body was placed in a borrowed tomb, but no tomb could hold the body of the Lord. On the morning of the third day came the welcome message to Mary Magdalene, to Mary the mother of James, and to other women who were with them as they came to the tomb, saw the large entrance stone rolled away, and noted the tomb was empty. Two angels said to the weeping women: “Why

seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen."<sup>33</sup>

Yes, the Lord had indeed risen. He appeared to Mary; He was seen by Cephas, or Peter, then by His brethren of the Twelve. He was seen by Joseph Smith, who declared: "This is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives! For we saw him, even on the right hand of God."<sup>34</sup>

Our Mediator, our Redeemer, our Brother, our Advocate with the Father died for our sins and the sins of all mankind. The Atonement of Jesus Christ is the foreordained but voluntary act of the Only Begotten Son of God. He offered His life as a redeeming ransom for us all.

His mission, His ministry among men, His teachings of truth, His acts of mercy, His unwavering love for us prompt our gratitude and warm our hearts. Jesus Christ, Savior of the world—even the Son of God—was and is the ultimate pioneer, for He has gone before, showing all others the way to follow. May we ever follow Him, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### NOTES

1. As quoted by Wilford Woodruff in *The Utah Pioneers* (1880), 23.
2. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 20 vols. (1989), "pioneer," 11:883.
3. Ruth 1:16–17.
4. John 3:28.
5. Luke 3:16.
6. Matthew 3:14.
7. Matthew 3:15–17.
8. John 1:29.
9. Matthew 11:11.
10. Matthew 4:19.
11. Matthew 16:16.
12. John 19:27.
13. John 19:26.
14. Isaiah 60:2.
15. Amos 8:11.
16. Quoted in Roger Hillas, "The History of the Book," *Washington Post*, 10 Apr. 1996.
17. Joseph Smith—History 1:11.
18. Joseph Smith—History 1:13–17.
19. Acts 10:38.
20. Matthew 6:9–10.
21. Luke 22:42.
22. Matthew 25:40.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 64:10.
24. Matthew 22:37–39.
25. Luke 18:22.
26. Mark 5:23.
27. Mark 5:35.
28. Mark 5:36.
29. Mark 5:39–40.
30. Mark 5:40–42.
31. Mark 15:13–14.
32. Matthew 27:24.
33. Luke 24:5–6.
34. Doctrine and Covenants 76:22–23.

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

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#### President Hinckley

President Thomas S. Monson has just spoken to us, and the choir has sung "Oh, May My Soul Commune with Thee."

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve will now speak to us.