

Elder M. Russell Ballard

How is it with us?

It is wonderful, my brothers and sisters, to meet in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in this remarkable new Conference Center at the dawn of a new millennium.

One hundred years ago, President Lorenzo Snow stood in the Tabernacle to open the 70th annual conference of the Church. It was the first conference of the 1900s, and it came at the end of a period of great trial and tribulation for the Church. Total Church membership then was approaching 300,000, with the majority of those members living in Utah.

On Friday, April 6, 1900, President Snow said: "The Lord has prospered us amazingly, and we are doing large things at the present time. . . . Now that we are approaching our seventy-first year, the Lord expects that we will do something—something that will cause the nations to marvel, as what we have done has caused them already to wonder."

And then President Snow asked this compelling question: "Now, Latter-day Saints," he said, "how is it with us? We have received the Gospel. We have received the kingdom of God, established on the earth. We have had trouble; we have been persecuted. We were driven from Ohio; we were driven from Missouri; we were driven from Nauvoo; and once we were driven for a time from this beautiful city. Many have lost thousands of dollars; lost their homes and all they had, and some of the brethren have seen their wives and children lay down their lives because of the hardships they had to experience. . . . The people have looked with astonishment at the willingness of the Latter-day Saints to suffer these things. Why do we do this? . . . What is it that enables us to endure these persecutions and still rejoice?"

President Snow gave this answer: "It is because we have had revelations from the Almighty; because He has spoken to us in our souls and has given to us the Holy Ghost. . . . This Church will stand, because it is upon a firm basis. It is not from man; it is not from the study of the New Testament or the Old Testament; it is not the result of the learning that we received in colleges nor seminaries, but it has come directly from the Lord. The Lord has shown it to us by the revealing principle of the Holy Spirit of light and every man can receive this same spirit" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1900, 2–3).

Examine our commitment to Christ

It would be well for us, my brothers and sisters, to give careful consideration to that same question today: "How is it with us?" A century has passed; we are now in our 171st year as a church. Church membership is now approaching 11 million worldwide. Our members are respected leaders in almost every field of endeavor in nearly every country. The Church is growing. Temples are being built at an unprecedented pace. Missionary work continues to move forward. Church meetings are held on a regular basis in nearly every nation. Yet, as our prophets have indicated, "the Lord expects that we will do something."

But what? What is it that needs our personal attention? As I read and ponder the scriptures and carefully consider the Lord's counsel to His followers in every dispensation of time, it appears to me that the most important thing *every* one of us can do is to examine our own commitment and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. We must carefully guard against spiritual apathy and work to maintain the full measure of our loving loyalty to the Lord.

True discipleship precludes complacency

While it is true that extraordinary strides are being made throughout the Church, the enormity of the task before us is overwhelming. Simply stated, we have a ministry to all of our Heavenly Father's children on both sides of the veil. In that context, we have barely scratched the surface of our calling. True discipleship, therefore, precludes any complacency. The Lord expects us to continue moving the Church forward and even to accelerate our pace toward the literal fulfillment of Daniel's prophetic vision of "a stone . . . cut out without hands . . . that . . . became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:34-35).

To do this more effectively, each one of us needs to follow Nephi's counsel to "press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. [For] if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Nephi 31:20). The power of the Holy Ghost will fill our hearts and minds as we look to the Savior for answers to the many challenges of life.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, it is important that we each know for ourselves that Jesus is the Christ and that He has restored to the earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith the fulness of His everlasting gospel. As we press forward in His service, spiritual experiences will increase our faith, and we will find great joy. Our understanding of the essential doctrines and eternal truths that have been restored will become a firm foundation of our faith. And as we come to know and understand these true doctrines for ourselves, we will discover that there is also a great need for us to share our knowledge and beliefs with others while always maintaining their friendship and goodwill.

Share gospel truths with others

While we should be pleased to testify to the truthfulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to all who will hear our message, there are times when all that we can hope to accomplish is to help those who are not members of the Church better understand our basic beliefs. There are many people who know a little about us, who are curious and who wonder about us but who are not ready to change their lifestyle or make eternal commitments. We need to be prepared to teach them in ways that they can understand and appreciate, even if they are not yet prepared to respond to spiritual promptings and to accept the gospel in their lives.

For example, it has been my experience that when members and our missionaries are guided by the Spirit, our conversations with non-Latter-day Saint friends and associates flow easily and naturally to the subject of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. All of us, regardless of race, color, or creed, belong to the family of our Heavenly Father. Most people share this belief. Our understanding and knowledge of this basic truth should compel us to love all of God's children as our brothers and sisters and to explain to them that we all lived premortally as spirit children of our Heavenly Father. There we learned about and accepted His plan for us to come to earth to gain a mortal body and be tested. Our deep-rooted respect for all mankind is enhanced by our understanding of our relationship one to another in our premortal life.

This understanding then makes it possible to explain in a nonthreatening way our belief in our eternal relationship to Jesus Christ and our deep commitment to Him. Our hope and faith are rooted in the profound understanding that He lives today and that He continues to lead and guide His Church and

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His people. We rejoice in the knowledge of the living Christ, and we reverently acknowledge the miracles He continues to work today in the lives of those who have faith in Him. He is the head of the Church, which bears His name. He is our Savior and our Redeemer. Through Him we worship and pray to our Heavenly Father. We are grateful beyond measure for the essential and awesome power His Atonement has in each of our lives.

Because we love the Lord, we should be spiritually sensitive to moments when we can share the powerful and important truths of the gospel with others. Perhaps more importantly, however, we should seek at all times to purify ourselves and to lead such worthy lives that the Light of Christ emanates from us in all that we say and do. Our day-to-day lives should stand as immutable witness of our faith in Christ. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12).

Teaching about the Restoration

Once these important principles are understood, we can then explain and expand the understanding of our Father's children by sharing with them how Jesus Himself established and organized His Church in the meridian of time by giving "some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12).

From there we can help our friends and neighbors understand the Apostasy, or falling away from the original Church organized by the Lord, which was prophesied by those who helped to establish the Church in the first place. Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians who were eagerly anticipating the Second Coming of the Savior that "that day shall not come, except there come a falling away

first" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). He also warned Timothy that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but . . . they shall turn away their ears from the truth" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). And Peter presupposed a falling away when he spoke of "the times of refreshing" that would come before God would again "send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21).

Do you see how naturally and easily one principle of the Restoration leads to the next? Peter's prophecy almost begs for a discussion of the restoration of the gospel in these latter days through the Prophet Joseph Smith. This in turn demands a dialogue about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the restoration of the holy priesthood through the gift and power of God. From there it is so natural to share the principle of continuing revelation and the organization of the Church and its doctrines and programs.

Sharing testimonies is the greatest service

Brothers and sisters, the Lord expects us to do something. I believe we are expected to increase our own faith, shake off any possible feelings of apathy, and by the power of the Holy Ghost reaffirm our commitment and intensify our service to the Lord. Then, when we seek to clarify someone's understanding of the Church, our lives—well and faithfully lived—can serve as a magnifying glass through which others can examine the impact of gospel living. Under the light of our good example, the Spirit can enlarge understanding of the Church and its mission to all with whom we have contact.

We need not apologize for our beliefs nor back down from that which we know to be true. But we can share it in a spirit of loving understanding—boldly

and confidently, with an eye single to the glory of God—without pressuring our listeners or feeling that we have failed in our duty if they do not immediately accept what we believe.

When we have the companionship of the Holy Ghost, we can then do simple things to help bring better understanding of the gospel into the lives of the less-active members of the Church, as well as those who are not of our faith. There is no need for any new program to do this. We don't need a handbook or a calling or a training meeting. The only need is for good members of the Church to learn to rely upon the power of the Holy Ghost and, with this power, reach out and touch the lives of our Father's children. There is no greater service we can render than sharing our personal testimonies with those who lack an understanding of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

Resolve to do more to bless others

So, brothers and sisters, "how is it with us?" Are we ready to do something? Can each one of us resolve today to increase our personal spiritual preparation by seeking the guidance of the Holy Ghost and then, with His power as our companion, bless more of our Father's children with understanding and knowledge that the Church is true?

I testify that the Savior lives and He will bless each one of us if we will do all that we can to move this great work of His Church forward. May each one of us resolve to do something more as we be-

gin this new millennium is my prayer, which I offer humbly in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Faust

Elder Gary J. Coleman of the Seventy has just spoken to us, followed by Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

We remind the brethren of the general priesthood meeting which will convene here in the Conference Center this evening at 6:00 P.M. mountain standard time.

We call your attention to the need to move your clocks ahead one hour before retiring tonight because of the change to daylight time.

The nationwide Tabernacle Choir broadcast tomorrow morning will be from 9:30 to 10:00 A.M. mountain daylight time. The Sunday morning session of conference will immediately follow.

We express gratitude to the combined choir from Brigham Young University for the beautiful music they have provided this afternoon.

As you leave the conference this afternoon, we ask that you obey traffic rules, use caution, and be courteous in driving.

Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following his remarks, the choir will sing "More Holiness Give Me." The benediction will then be offered by Elder Athos M. Amorim of the Seventy.

Elder David B. Haight

A joy to be here

A little over two years ago at a meeting when President Gordon B. Hinckley announced this building would be built

in the year 2000, he then turned to me and said, "David, I expect you to be there."

President, I'm here. And I hope that if he says that we need another year or