

Build a Fortress of Spirituality and Protection

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When we live the gospel of Jesus Christ, when we draw upon the Savior's Atonement and press forward with faith, we are fortified against the adversary.

My dear brothers and sisters, as this conference comes to a close, I give thanks to our Father in Heaven for the counsel, truths, and revelation shared at this pulpit during the past two days. We have been taught by servants of God called to speak His holy words. The Lord has reminded us in latter-day revelation, "Whether by mine own voice or ... the voice of my servants, it is the same."¹

Looking over this vast congregation of Saints and picturing members watching general conference all over the world, I think of the gathering in the Book of Mormon when Jesus Christ appeared to the Nephites following His Crucifixion. He taught them the gospel and then encouraged, "Go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand."²

"Go ye unto your homes, and ponder" is the next step in taking to heart the words of prophets and Church leaders spoken in this sacred setting. Christ-centered homes are fortresses for the kingdom of God on earth in a day when, as prophesied, the devil "rage[s] in the hearts of the children of men, and stir[s] them up to anger against that which is good."³

People have built fortresses throughout history to keep the enemy outside. Often those fortresses included a guard tower where watchmen—like prophets—warned of menacing forces and coming attacks.

In early Utah pioneer times, my great-grandfather Thomas Rasband and his family were some of the first settlers to enter the Heber Valley in the beautiful Wasatch Mountains of Utah.

In 1859, Thomas helped construct the Heber fort, built for their protection. It was a simple structure of cottonwood logs positioned one next to the other, forming the perimeter of the fort. Log cabins were built inside the fortress using that common wall. The structure provided both security and safety for those pioneer families as they put down roots and worshipped the Lord.

So it is with us. Our homes are fortresses against the evils of the world. In our homes we come unto Christ by learning to follow His commandments, by studying the scriptures and praying together, and by helping one another stay on the covenant path. The new emphasis on personal and family study in the home through the curriculum *Come, Follow Me* is designed "to deepen our conversion and help us become more like Jesus Christ."⁴ In so doing we will become what Paul called "new creature[s]"⁵ with our hearts and souls in tune with God. We need that strength to face and deflect the assaults of the adversary.

As we live with devotion born of faith in Jesus Christ, we will feel the peaceful presence of the Holy Ghost, who guides us to truth, inspires us to live worthy of the Lord's blessings, and bears witness

that God lives and loves us. All this within the fortress of our own homes. But remember, our homes are only as powerful as the spiritual strength of each one of us within the walls.

President Russell M. Nelson has taught, "In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost."⁶ As the Lord's living prophet, seer, and revelator in this day, the watchman on the tower of our fortress, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he sees the advances of the enemy.

Brothers and sisters, we are at war with Satan for the souls of men. The battle lines were drawn in our pre-earth life. Satan and a third of our Father in Heaven's children turned away from His promises of exaltation. Since that time, the adversary's minions have been fighting the faithful who choose the Father's plan.

Satan knows his days are numbered and that time is growing shorter. As crafty and cunning as he is, he will not win. However, his battle for each one of our souls rages on.

For our safety, we must build a fortress of spirituality and protection for our very souls, a fortress that will not be penetrated by the evil one.

Satan is a subtle snake, sneaking into our minds and hearts when we have let our guard down, faced a disappointment, or lost hope. He entices us with flattery, a promise of ease, comfort, or a temporary high when we are low. He justifies pride, unkindness, dishonesty, discontent, and immorality, and in time we can be "past feeling."⁷ The Spirit can leave us. "And thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell."⁸

In contrast, we often feel the Spirit so powerfully as we sing praises to God with words like these:

*A mighty fortress is our God,
A tower of strength ne'er failing.
A helper mighty is our God,
O'er ills of life prevailing.⁹*

When we build a fortress of spiritual strength, we can shun the advances of the adversary, turn our backs on him, and feel the peace of the Spirit. We can follow the example of our Lord and Savior, who, when tempted in the wilderness, said, "Get thee behind me, Satan."¹⁰ We each have to learn by the experiences of life how to do that.

Such righteous purpose is well described in the Book of Mormon when Captain Moroni prepared the Nephites to face attacks from a deceitful, bloodthirsty, power-hungry Amalickiah. Moroni constructed fortresses to protect the Nephites "that they might live unto the Lord their God, and that they might maintain that which was called by their enemies the cause of Christians."¹¹ Moroni "was firm in the faith of Christ"¹² and was faithful "in keeping the commandments of God ... and resisting iniquity."¹³

When the Lamanites came to battle, they were astonished by the Nephites' preparation, and they were defeated. The Nephites thanked "the Lord their God, because of his matchless power in delivering them from the hands of their enemies."¹⁴ They had built fortresses for protection on the outside, and they had built faith in the Lord Jesus Christ on the inside—deep in their souls.

What are some ways we can fortify ourselves in troubled times, that we may be "instruments in the hands of God to bring about this great work"?¹⁵ Let's look to the scriptures.

We are obedient. The Lord commanded Father Lehi to send his sons back to Jerusalem to “seek the records, and bring them down hither into the wilderness.”¹⁶ Lehi didn’t question; he didn’t wonder why or how. Nor did Nephi, who responded, “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded.”¹⁷

Do we act with the willing obedience of Nephi? Or are we more inclined to question God’s commands as did Nephi’s brothers, whose lack of faith eventually turned them away from the Lord? Obedience, exercised with “holiness of heart,”¹⁸ is what the Lord asks of us.

We trust the Lord, who said to Joshua as he prepared to lead the Israelites into the promised land, “Be strong and of ... good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”¹⁹ Joshua trusted those words and counseled the people, “Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the Lord will do wonders among you.”²⁰ The Lord parted the waters of the Jordan, and the Israelites’ 40 years of wandering in the wilderness ended.

We stand for the truth, as did the prophet Abinadi in the Book of Mormon. Arrested, brought before King Noah and his wicked priests, Abinadi taught the Ten Commandments and preached powerfully that Christ would “come down among the children of men, and ... redeem his people.”²¹ He then, with faith deep within him, proclaimed, “O God, receive my soul,”²² and Abinadi “suffered death by fire.”²³

We make and renew our covenants by partaking of the sacrament and by worshipping in the temple. The sacrament is the centerpiece of our Sunday worship, where we are receiving the promise to “always have his Spirit to be with [us].”²⁴ With that sacred ordinance we commit to take upon us the name of Jesus Christ, to follow Him, and to shoulder our responsibilities in this divine work as He did. In the temple we can “lay aside the things of this world”²⁵ and feel the Lord’s presence and His transcendent peace. We can focus on our ancestors, our families, and eternal life in the presence of the Father. No wonder President Nelson stated recently in Rome, “The good that will emanate from this temple is incalculably great.”²⁶

We should have integrity in all that we do. We should develop discernment and discipline so that we do not have to continually determine what is right and what is wrong. We should take to heart the words of Peter, the early Church Apostle, who cautioned, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”²⁷

As we diligently strengthen our fortifications, we become like Jesus Christ, as His true disciples, with our very souls in His protection.

Your testimony of Jesus Christ is your personal fortress, the security for your soul. When my great-grandfather and his fellow pioneers built the Heber fort, they put up one log at a time until the fort was “fitly framed together”²⁸ and they were protected. So it is with testimony. One by one we gain a witness from the Holy Spirit as He speaks to our own spirit, teaching “truth in the inward parts.”²⁹ When we live the gospel of Jesus Christ, when we draw upon the Savior’s Atonement and press forward with faith, not fear, we are fortified against the wiles of the adversary. Our testimonies connect us to the heavens, and we are blessed with “the truth of all things.”³⁰ And, like pioneers protected by a fortress, we are safely encircled in the arms of the Savior’s love.

The prophet Ether taught, “Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God.”³¹

My dear brothers and sisters, I leave you with my blessing to go forth with confidence in the Lord and in His gospel. Put your arms around those who stumble and, with the strength of the Spirit within you, lead them lovingly back to the fortress of spirituality and protection. Seek "to be like Jesus"³² in all that you do; shun evil and temptations; repent, as we were admonished yesterday by our dear prophet; be honest in heart; be upright and pure; show compassion and charity; and love the Lord your God with the devotion of a true disciple.

Our testimonies of the gospel of Jesus Christ, our homes, our families, and our membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be our personal fortresses of protection surrounding us and shielding us from the power of the evil one. Of this I bear my solemn witness in the name of our Lord and Savior, even Jesus Christ, amen.