

# Where Is the Church?

JAMES E. FAUST

I never come to this pulpit without being subdued and humbled, and I invite your faith and prayers.

Some time ago I was walking in the center of Salt Lake City, on my way to City Creek Canyon, where I usually walk every day. A car with an out-of-state license plate was driving by. It pulled over and stopped. The driver asked, "Where is the church of the Mormons?" I assumed that they were thinking of some place or building. I took time to point out the Church Office Building and the Church Administration Building and the magnificent temple and the historic tabernacle, most of which were visible from our vantage point. They thanked me and went on their way.

## Is It in Our Buildings?

May I now ask you the same question: "Where is the Church?" Is the Church our beautiful chapels, most of which are well maintained, neat, and clean, of which we are justly proud? Church cannot be just our chapels because for several years in the beginning of the Church, there were no chapels. We had only a temple. So if you were asked, "Where is the Church?" would you answer, "The temples"?

A few years ago, on a beautiful Halloween evening, my wife and I were in the temple in Kirtland, Ohio. In the late fall afternoon the sun was streaking through the old, wavy, hand-blown windowpanes. The building was light and airy and magnificent. Since some of my forebears were involved in its construction, I was humbled and honored to be under its roof. Within its walls and under its spell, I was enchanted by its beauty. I was so impressed with the building that I came back to Church headquarters and told the Brethren that it would be wonderful if that building were still operating as one of our temples. Elder Packer corrected my thinking when he said, "We do not have the building, but, when our people left, they took with them that which was important. They preserved the keys of the ordinances, the covenants, the endowment, and the sealing power. They took with them all the essentials which we have today." So the Church cannot, in and of itself, be the temples,

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magnificent as they are, because the temple buildings alone do not bless. They are the exquisite containers for the pearls of great price administered therein by the priesthood of God.

For the past several years I have assisted President Howard W. Hunter, who was assigned by the First Presidency to acquire land in Jerusalem and direct the building of the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. We worked very closely with President Jeffrey R. Holland, David Galbraith, Robert Taylor, Fred Schwendiman, and many, many others in this great endeavor. Through a series of miracles, a center came into being and is now being used by students of this university. The building is magnificent. It is a veritable jewel. None of us who have been involved can explain what we feel in our souls regarding that wonderful edifice. The building is close to some of the places made sacred by the presence of the Savior. It is worthy of the Holy City. It is worthy of this great university and its sponsoring institution, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But the building alone does not bless. Now our great challenge is to use the building so that it somehow, somehow, influences the lives of those who study there, who pray there, who worship there—and who change and become more worthy. The magnificence of the center alone may inspire, but our many educational facilities and activities on this campus and elsewhere will get no one into the kingdom of God. So, where is the Church then?

Thanks to my wonderful wife, the Spirit of the Lord has often been in our various dwelling places. While we have lived within them, each has been a holy place for me. In our married life we have lived in single rooms with bathrooms down the hall and small apartments, and we have owned three houses. In a sense the Church has been in each, but I would not want to go back and live in our other houses even though we spent much of our

happy lives in them. The kingdom of God is not there.

### **Is It in Our Families?**

Is the Church then in our families? We are getting close to the correct answer here. In a sense a family can foster the teachings of the Savior better than any other institution. In large measure the Church exists to strengthen families. I wish to define *family* very broadly. In the Church we have traditional families and single-parent families. Each single is considered in a sense to be a Church family. We also have ward families in which the bishop is a spiritual father. Because of the erosion of family life and family values, we frequently hear urgent pleas requesting the Church to take over as an organization more activities that were formerly looked upon as family activities. An example of this are the super youth activities, some of which have taken the youth at great expense and considerable risk to far distant places. I fear that in more than a few instances the cost of local Church sponsored teenage and single adult activities may have prevented some families from having vacations or other activities together.

We also hear requests for a new program for that group or a new organization for this group or a new activity for the other group. We already have the new program. It is called the family. It includes family prayer, family scripture study, family home evening, and family loyalty. I wonder if our maturing youth can hold everything together without daily prayer and daily scripture study. The family is the best environment to encourage both. It is my opinion that many Church-sponsored activities could yield to family activities when there is a conflict. I believe parents have the right to decide in those conflicts. I say this because I am persuaded that family activities can be more effective in fostering the eternal values of love, honesty, chastity, industry, self-worth, and personal integrity than any other institution.

Lou Holtz, a successful football coach from Notre Dame, recently stated:

*The family is where our healthy values are formed and shaped. I know no greater challenge or more important role in life than in preparing our children to take their places as contributing citizens. We cannot relinquish this most important responsibility to gang leaders, drug leaders or even our own government. Nothing can destroy individuals or our country as quickly as drugs. It is not confined to a segment of our society, and it has created more damage than anything else I have witnessed in my lifetime. I have never heard a successful man or woman get up and say, "I owe my success to drugs and alcohol." Yet I know thousands of people who have said publicly or in the press that they have ruined their lives because of drugs and alcohol. Suffice it to say government can't stop it, police can't, but the family can.*

Because of the complexity of the drug/alcohol problem, some may feel that it is an oversimplification to say strong family leadership can solve the problem. Certainly not all families can, but I am persuaded that families with enough internal caring, discipline, commitment, and love, somehow, someway, can handle the majority of their problems. However strong or weak the family may be, it can usually provide a better solution to most challenges than can any other institution in society or the government no matter how well intentioned they may be. I believe the principle reason a caring family is the best antidote for drug and alcohol abuse and other problems is that unqualified love can flow from kinship relationships. In successful families there is usually a strong caring head. Ideally this would be a holder of the priesthood whose power and influence is maintained by "persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned" (D&C 121:41).

The home priesthood is desirable because whomsoever is blessed by this power, God will

bless. But there have been many successful caring heads of families who are mothers, grandmothers, and others. What seems to distinguish a successful family is that the members of the family continue to care. They just don't give up. They never quit. They hang together through hardships and death and other problems.

We know of a large close-knit family that is wonderfully successful in holding everything together. When the parents feel they are losing influence with teenagers, the help of cousins is enlisted to exert some counter peer pressure.

I would urge members of extended families, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, to reach out in concern, to succor. Mostly what is needed from grandparents, aunts, and uncles is unreserved love manifest as interest and concern. It builds confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth. Reproving and chastening of adult family members should be rare indeed. We are told that it should happen only when a person is moved upon by the Holy Ghost. But I have been grateful for those in my family who have loved me enough to give me both the gentle and strong reproof on occasion as needed. We read in Proverbs: "He that refuseth reproof erreth" (Proverbs 10:17).

The fact that some do not have functioning traditional families is no reason to move further in the direction of diminishing or abandoning family activities for those who can and should foster them. With the increased onslaught of forces that cause families to disintegrate, we ought to dig in our heels to preserve all that is great and good in the family. We are reminded that in times of tribulations, the Nephites were not fighting for a political cause, such as monarchy or power; rather, they "were inspired by a better cause." For "they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church" (Alma 43:45).

Some may find it strong doctrine, but I quote again from Alma in the Book of Mormon: “And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed” (Alma 43:47).

As a corollary to the defending of the family, there is a duty to teach family members that the commandments of God may not be broken without drawing a penalty. President Stephen L Richards said: “I want this taught to the youth so that they may comprehend it. It is their due and their right to have these things given to them without dilution or apology. This is justice and mercy. Neither shall rob the other.” President Richards went on to state that “It is no kindness to any youth to whitewash various sins such as lying and deceit which are so prevalent today.” “And perhaps the greatest of all is that robbery which steals virtue from either man or woman” (CR, April 1957, p. 99).

### **Is It in Our Hearts?**

So the family is and must always be an important part of the Church. But the Lord’s kingdom ultimately must be found in our own hearts before it can be anywhere else. Paul gave us a key when he said to the Romans: “He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit” (Romans 8:27). He also said, “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:5).

In the story of David, who was called in his youth to be the future king of Israel, we learn how much the Lord judges by what is in the heart. We all remember how the Lord sent the prophet Samuel to the house of Jesse, saying, “For I have provided me a king among his sons” (1 Samuel 16:1). One by one, Jesse had his sons pass before Samuel as he looked for the future king of Israel. Samuel’s instructions from the Lord were, “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; . . . for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord

looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). As the seven sons passed before him, Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord hath not chosen these.”

*And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.*

*And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.*

*Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.* [1 Samuel 16:10–13]

Like Daniel of old, what we do and do not do in life originates in our hearts. As he stood in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon who captured Jerusalem, “Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank” (Daniel 1:8).

The greatness of Willard Richard’s heart was manifest just before the martyrdom of the Prophet.

*Joseph said to Dr. Richards, “If we go into the cell, will you go in with us?” The Doctor answered, “Brother Joseph you did not ask me to cross the river with you—you did not ask me to come to Carthage—you did not ask me to come to jail with you—and do you think I would forsake you now? But I will tell you what I will do; if you are condemned to be hung for treason, I will be hung in your stead, and you shall go free.” Joseph said, “You cannot.” The doctor replied, “I will.” [HC 6:616]*

Alma teaches us the necessity for having the good seed planted in our hearts:

*Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in*

*your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me. [Alma 32:28]*

Revelation comes to us in our minds, but it also comes in our hearts. In a revelation to Oliver Cowdery in Doctrine and Covenants, section 8, verse 2, the Lord says, “Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.” To me it is very interesting that the dwelling place of the Holy Ghost is in our hearts.

What if the Lord appeared to each of us as he did to Solomon and said, “Ask what I shall give thee”? How would you answer? Would you ask for a new car? A new home? A blessing of health? Or a station in life? Solomon asked for none of these. He did not ask for fame or for fortune. He asked: “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart.” This reply pleased the Lord.

*And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;*

*Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.*

*And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. [1 Kings 3:11–13]*

And Paul’s prayer was that Christ might dwell in our hearts by faith.

There is some strong language in section 64 of the Doctrine and Covenants regarding who has claim upon our hearts. “I, the Lord, require the hearts of the children of men” (D&C 64:22).

So when the inquirers in the car with the out-of-state license asked, “Where is the church of the Mormons?” how should I have answered? It has bothered me ever since. If I had pointed to my chest and said that the Church should be first and foremost in my heart, the inquiring travelers surely would have gone away somewhat bewildered. But I would have been more accurate than I was by directing them to our beloved, magnificent, sky-piercing spires, the great majestic dome, and the other world-famous monuments and edifices, wonderful and unique and great as they are? I would have been more correct because the Lord said, “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20–21).

So The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is in our heart of hearts, and, when it is in our hearts as individuals, it will also be in our great buildings of worship, in our great educational institutions, in our magnificent temples, and it will also be in our homes and families.

Mostly, what I want you to remember this evening is that this humble servant has a testimony of the divinity of this holy work to which we have all been called. And I testify as one of the special witnesses, like Peter when some of the early Saints had begun to fall away, and the Savior was troubled. The Savior said to the Twelve, “Will ye also go away?” Peter responded for the Twelve and said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:67–69). To this I testify in his sacred name, even Jesus Christ. Amen.