

# Celestial Marriage— A Little Heaven on Earth

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**M**y brothers and sisters, it's a pleasure to be here today. Many thoughts went through my mind as I prepared for this occasion. I wanted to make sure that I deliver the kind of a message that is going to be helpful. I hope the Spirit will be with me that I might do just that.

The subject will be that of marriage, with an eternal perspective. *Temple marriage* describes the place you go to have the marriage performed. *Celestial marriage* is being true to the sacred covenants you make in that temple marriage ceremony—living celestial principles in the marriage relationship.

A celestial marriage requires, after the vows are taken, a continuing consecrated life of worthiness leading to happiness and exaltation, which President Kimball has talked to you about. If we live the laws properly, as they are intended, we will, with another individual and with our family, be able to have a little heaven on earth. We are practicing, when we live the laws pertaining to celestial marriage, the same laws that are practiced in heaven. We are practicing how to live with God the Father and his Son and with our families in the eternities to come. That to me is the message to the world of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

So my title this morning is “Celestial Marriage—A Little Heaven on Earth.” I would like to reinforce in your minds the principle of celestial marriage and the gospel lesson it gives to us.

## Goals for Righteous Living

Something as wonderful as a celestial marriage doesn't just happen.

In the story *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice approaches the Cheshire Cat and asks, “Would you please tell me which way I ought to go from here?”

The Cheshire Cat replies, “That depends a great deal on where you want to go.”

Alice says, “I admit, I don't much care where.”

The Cheshire Cat then says, “Then it doesn't really matter much which way you go, does it?”

“Just so I get somewhere,” responds Alice.

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*Robert D. Hales was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 9 November 1976.*

Then the Cheshire Cat reveals an interesting truth, "Oh, you're sure to get there if you keep walking long enough."

What is the message? How many of us are going through life today telling ourselves, "If we keep going long enough, we're going to get somewhere," but are not defining exactly where that place is we want to be? "Somewhere" is not good enough. We must know where we want to go and be firmly committed to getting there. And we should get that knowledge and commitment early.

Alma stated, "Oh, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God" (Alma 37:35). That says it all. Do it now.

### **Temple Recommends**

Once we are committed to a celestial marriage, we should understand and do the things that lead to it:

To enter the temple, you will need what is called a recommend. A searching interview will be conducted first by your bishop and then by your stake president.

First, they will ask, "Do you have a testimony of the gospel?"

Second, "Do you support your local leaders and the General Authorities? Do you sustain the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a prophet, seer, and revelator, recognizing no other person on earth as authorized to hold all of the keys of the priesthood? Do you sustain the other General Authorities and local authorities in your stake and ward?"

Third, "Do you accept and follow the teachings and programs of the Church? By that we mean, do you earnestly strive to live in accordance with the accepted rules and doctrines of the Church?" Further, "Do you have affiliation with or sympathy with any groups or individuals who teach or practice doctrines which are not officially sanctioned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?"

Fourth, "Do you keep the Word of Wisdom, including abstinence from the use of harmful drugs?"

Fifth, "Are you morally clean? Are you free from adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and all of the other moral transgressions that confront you in this life?"

Sixth, "Are you a full tithe payer?"

Seventh, "Are you totally honest in your dealings with your fellowmen?"

Eighth, "Will you and do you regularly wear your temple garments, if you have already been to the temple?"

Ninth, "Are you a member in good standing in the Church? By that we mean, will you earnestly strive to do your duty in the Church, to attend your sacrament, priesthood, and other meetings, and to obey the rules, laws, and commandments of the Church and of God?" Next, "Is anything amiss in your life that has not been fully resolved with your appropriate priesthood authorities that should be cleared up at this time?"

Tenth, "Are you free of legal entanglements?"

Eleventh, "Do you consider yourself worthy in every way to go to the temple?"

The importance of thinking of this recommend in connection with marriage is that, when you choose the companion you're going to live with for time and all eternity, you should ask yourself, "Am I sure he or she is able to live within the confines of this recommend?"

### **The Endowment**

After you obtain a recommend, you may then go to the temple and receive an endowment. Before a person can be married or sealed as husband or wife in the temple, he or she receives the ordinances of the endowment. What is the temple endowment? In the *Discourses of Brigham Young* we read:

*Let me give you a definition in brief. Your endowment is to receive all those ordinances in the house of the lord which are necessary for you after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens pertaining to the holy priesthood and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth or hell. [Discourses of Brigham Young (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941), p. 416]*

“The endowment,” Elder ElRay L. Christiansen has said, “is a most important and significant blessing, and the Lord desires his worthy children to receive it” (*Temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 1976).

Elder James E. Talmage, formerly of the Council of the Twelve, spoke very significantly of the temple endowment as it is administered in our modern temples when he said:

*It comprises instruction relating to the significance and sequence of past dispensations, the importance of the present as the greatest and grandest era of human history. This course of instruction includes a recital of the most prominent events of the creative period, the condition of our first parents in the Garden of Eden, their disobedience and consequent expulsion from that blissful abode, their condition in the lone and dreary world when doomed to live by labor and sweat, the plan of redemption by which the great transgression may be atoned, the period of the great apostasy, the restoration of the gospel with all its ancient powers and privileges, the absolute and indispensable condition of personal purity and devotion to the right in present life, and a strict compliance with gospel requirements.*

*The ordinances of the endowment embody certain obligations on the part of the individual, such as covenant and promise to observe the law of strict virtue and chastity, to be charitable, benevolent, tolerant and pure; to devote both talent and material means to the spread of truth and the uplifting of the race; to maintain devotion to the cause of truth;*

*and to seek in every way to contribute to the great preparation that the earth may be made ready to receive her King,—the Lord Jesus Christ. With the taking of each covenant and the assuming of each obligation, a promised blessing is pronounced, contingent upon the faithful observation of the conditions.*

Elder Talmage also said that “no jot, iota, or tittle of the temple rites is otherwise than uplifting and sanctifying” (James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1968], pp. 83, 84).

So it is that we have the privilege as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to plan for and prepare for a celestial marriage. It is your parents’ responsibility to teach this early in your life. It is your responsibility to teach it to your children. It should be taught at family home evening. Pictures of a temple should be in your home. I hope that in your room here at college you have a picture of a temple.

President Kimball told a story at the dedication of the St. George Temple of a mother with three boys. Their father had gone off to sea, never to return. As a reminder of her husband, and to remind the boys not to go to sea, she put up a picture in her living room of a beautiful clipper ship sailing on the ocean. Every day she stood there and told the boys, “Never go to sea.” There isn’t a mother here who doesn’t know what happened. All three boys went to sea. Why? Because when they looked at that picture, they saw the adventure their father saw: the wind and the sails of that great clipper ship, the spray coming up. The visual image had a powerful effect upon the boys’ desires. And so it is that President Kimball has indicated, “Wouldn’t it be well to put up a picture of the temple in our homes and give that same adventure to your children, that they might set the objective for themselves to go to the temple?”

### **Selecting a Companion**

The selection of a companion is what I would like to talk about next. You are here at an important period of your life, and are asking yourself, “What is marriage all about? How do I find the right person to marry?” Let me suggest an approach. Measure the spiritual level of your potential future companions. First, if they are members, are they active and fully committed? Are they passive? Are they antagonistic? Second, if they are not members, are they receptive to the gospel and its teachings? Are they non-committal or antagonistic?

I’d like to spend just a moment, drawing from twenty years of priesthood work, to talk to you on this. If you marry an active member in the temple, marry for time and all eternity in the new and everlasting covenant, will you have problems? Yes. Will you be able to solve them? Yes. Will your chance be better to solve the problems and strengthen your testimony than if you had not married in the temple? Yes. My brothers and sisters, if you marry somebody who is antagonistic to the Church or passive, I merely want to say one thing to you. You are placing yourself in a position where you will find, someday, that you will have to choose between that individual and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That is a very heavy responsibility.

When you are choosing your companion, make sure that both of you have a desire for a celestial marriage relationship, a desire to have a family for eternity, a desire to have a companion for eternity and to live in the presence of our Heavenly Father.

### **The New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage**

The Lord has made it clear that we can be together in eternity with our companion only if we abide the law. In modern revelation he says, “Therefore, prepare thy heart to receive and obey instructions which I am about to give unto you; for all those who have this law

revealed unto them must obey the same. For behold, I reveal unto you a new and an everlasting covenant” (D&C 132:3–4). Every member of the Church should read and study section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Do you realize that, when one has the responsibility to be a sealer in the temple and has these keys, there is no one between him and God when that ordinance is performed? There is no priesthood authority between them, you and your loved one at the altar, and God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. It is a beautiful and a touching ceremony.

The deep underlying purpose of temple marriage was clarified by the Redeemer himself when he said, “And as pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant, it was instituted for the fulness of my glory; and he that receiveth a fulness thereof must and shall abide the law, or he shall be damned, saith the Lord God” (D&C 132:6).

The Lord said also in that same section of the Doctrine and Covenants, “Therefore, if a man marry him a wife in the world, and he marry her not by me nor by my word, and he covenant with her so long as he is in the world and she with him, their covenant and marriage are not of force when they are dead, and when they are out of the world; therefore, they are not bound by any law when they are out of the world” (D&C 132:15). Do we really realize that in the Doctrine and Covenants we are told that unless we enter into celestial marriage we cannot reach the highest degree of glory in the celestial kingdom? It is also clear what will happen to those who never receive the blessings of the temple marriage, and that is that their binding is until “death do thee part”—a very sad thing to contemplate.

The aim of the gospel and the purpose of celestial marriage are not only to keep us together, but also to make us eligible for our Heavenly Father’s highest reward, exaltation in the celestial kingdom, increase in that kingdom, and being together with our families.

### Supporting Each Other

I would now like to discuss the partnership aspect of marriage and family life.

Let us talk frankly for a moment. Marriage is like climbing a mountain. You tie yourself to a companion, and you start up the mountain of life. As a child comes along, you tie him to mom and dad and continue your journey. The ropes will hold all of the mountain climbers together. But there are many elements—the wind and the rain and the snow and the ice—all the elements of the world will tear at you to pull you off that eternal mountain. How do you reach the summit? If either mom or dad cuts the rope which binds them, chances are that one or the other may fall off the mountain and perhaps pull down some of the rest of the family. The whole family could fall off that gospel mountain and not reach that eternal summit. Let us always be mindful that, as older brothers and sisters, you are also tied to this mountain team that is attempting to return back into the presence of your Heavenly Father. If you cut the rope that binds you to mom and dad and fall off the mountain—chances are that you will take one or two of your brothers and sisters with you. You can't take that chance. You, by definition, are a leader.

Someone has said it this way: "Thee lift me, and I'll lift thee, and we'll ascend together." What does that mean? I can remember an experience in my life that illustrates this idea. I was at Harvard Business School. I was stretched to my capacity. In the first year of that institution, the teachers take away every bit of self-confidence you have, no matter what your background is before you get there, so that you learn what it's like to have to achieve more than you've ever done in your life before. The program is designed to teach you how to think under pressure. They try to duplicate real life.

At an important point in my schooling, a mission president, John E. Carr, asked me to be an elders quorum president. It is the only time

in my life that I ever questioned an assignment. I went home to talk to my wife. For every woman here and every man here the question will come in life, "When is the time to serve? When is the right time?" The only answer I can give you is, "When you are asked." So I went home and said to my wife, "There is a chance of failing in my schooling if I become an elders quorum president." She said to me the words which have helped for many years: "Bob, I would rather have an active priesthood holder than a man who holds a master's degree from Harvard." But as she put her arms around me, she said, "We'll do them both." That is eternal partnership.

"Thee lift me, and I'll lift thee, and we'll ascend together"—that's the message.

A marriage partnership is not a crutch. You do not marry somebody you think is a little higher than the angels and then lean on him. You develop yourself and your own gifts and talents. As each partner develops, you grow together, supporting and strengthening one another.

My wife has always supported me. We sat down before we were married, and I said to her, "You know, Mary, I feel that to be successful in business I will have to work hard domestically and perhaps internationally. Do you want to go on that trip with me?" She said she did. Ten years after we were married, I was asked to go to England, and there she was with me. Then we went to Germany, and then to Spain. She became international, bicultural, bilingual, because she had made her mind up that we would work and develop together.

Remember, if you would, to treat each other in kindness, to respect each other for who you are and what you want to be.

I would like to tell you the story of a woman who was in my ward some years ago when I was a bishop. She and her husband were having a marriage problem. As they spoke with me, she began to tear down her husband in all those key areas that a man must

have to have some respect for himself. She talked of his inadequacy as a father, his inadequacies in marital relations, his inadequacy as a provider, his inadequacies socially, contrasted with what she had expected. I asked her, "Why do you do this to a man you should love and sustain?" She said, "Oh, it's much better to argue with someone you love because you know where you can hurt them the most." And she *meant* it.

Now let's think about that for a minute. Can you really hurt a stranger? Who are the people you can hurt the most? Is it your roommate? Is it your companion? Is it your mom and dad? Is it your brother or sister? Isn't it true that while you're at this institution you should learn how to strengthen those around you, not tear them down? Shouldn't you be developing an attitude with your roommates so that it becomes a natural part of you to be supportive and helpful? You share your strengths and weaknesses with their strengths and weaknesses, again, as you climb that mountain together and help one another.

The hero of Homer's *Iliad*, Achilles, had a mother, Thetis, who dipped Achilles in the waters of the River Styx so that he became invulnerable, the story goes, except for that part of his heel by which she held him. There he was unprotected. From this story has come the idea of the proverbial Achilles' heel. Everybody in this room has an Achilles' heel. Achilles was the bravest, handsomest, swiftest of the army of Agamemnon, but he was slain by Paris, whose arrow was guided by Apollo to his vulnerable heel. Every mother would love to dip her children into the waters of the River Styx and give them protection, but this is impossible. We must learn to use our free agency and take our opportunities for growth. Everyone has his weaknesses. The adversary knows our Achilles' heels. He knows the Achilles' heels of your loved ones, your friends, your roommates, your brothers and sisters, your parents. Do *you* understand your

Achilles' heel? Do you know the situations you have to stay away from and what your weaknesses are? Sit down and talk to yourself, because the secret of a happy marriage is to protect the Achilles' heels of those you love and not take advantage of the weaknesses of those you know the best, love the most, and ultimately can hurt the most.

In the Doctrine and Covenants (I would hope each one of you would write this verse down and put it in your pocket and have it with you at all times for those challenging moments) we read, "Therefore, strengthen your brethren in all your conversation, in all your prayers, in all your exhortations, and in all your doings" (D&C 108:7). In other words, every day you help one another as you speak, as you pray, in your exhortations, and in your doings.

Working together is a sacrifice. You have to make sure that the person you're dating right now is going to be willing to sacrifice. I'll give you one story in life that helped me learn this. I can remember a young couple just out of college. One parent gave them a home; the other parent gave them the furnishings and a new car. They had everything. They were beautiful people and they were popular. They had everything in the world given to them. Well, you know the story. Within three years they were divorced. They hadn't worked and sacrificed. They had leaned on each other and on their parents as a crutch, had crippled themselves, and hadn't grown. They hadn't learned the hard part. They hadn't worried about making their marriage work. How do you support your wife? What is the role of a priesthood holder? What is the role of a woman with the priesthood? Again, it's making sure that you share and grow together.

### **Family Support in Church Callings**

My wife has taught me to grow in a number of ways, one of which I'll share with you for a moment. (Usually it's a little easier to tell this

story when she's not with me. She's here today, and I'm sure I'll be talked with afterwards.) After serving as an elders quorum president, a branch president, and a bishop over a period of five years, we moved to a new stake. The stake president recognized the great leadership talents of my wife. In fact, I've spent most of my life being known as the husband of Mary Hales, but I don't mind that. My wife was asked to be a Relief Society president, which she has been twice in her life. (As I've been a bishop three times, we've shared our priesthood and our Relief Society responsibilities.) She went to her first meeting with the bishop, a welfare meeting and a priesthood correlation meeting, while I chased two youngsters up and down the halls, through the parking lot, through the cultural hall, and had my first experience with waiting. I waited one and a half hours. When she came out, I had one boy in my arm and was holding the other by the hand. As the door opened and she came out of the bishop's office, I had that look on my face. You know the look. I didn't have the courage to say anything, but I just gave her a look that said, "Do you realize you've kept me waiting an hour and a half?" All she did was raise five fingers and say, "Five years." That is how long she had been waiting for me. Then I began to realize it was going to be my job to support my wife in her calling just as she had supported me as a priesthood holder. There isn't a man here who can't learn from that story.

I've heard of one husband who, on a Tuesday evening, was putting on his blue suit, his white shirt, and his blue tie. His wife asked him, "Where are you going?" His answer was very clear: "I'm going to Relief Society. One of us has to go." That story would warm the heart of every Relief Society president in the world.

At the University of Utah, in an evening seminar, I was speaking to the M.B.A.'s and senior business students. I noticed a young man with a baby sitting alone near the front of the hall. Afterwards he came up and spoke to

me, still holding the baby. He had a few questions about his career. I said, "Where is your wife?" He said, "Well, when we were married, I promised her that she would have the opportunity of attending Relief Society. Tonight is Relief Society, and so I have our son at this seminar."

Every woman here should understand the importance of Relief Society in her marriage, and every priesthood holder should understand it.

I travel to stakes now, and I have learned that about one out of every five women, on average, goes to Relief Society. Sisters, start your habit of going to Relief Society at Brigham Young University. And brethren, you start your habit of supporting them in this activity. It is one of the most important chances they'll have for continuing education, for feeling self-worth, for being able to share testimonies in a testimony meeting.

There will be times when your wives will say to themselves that they won't be able to get through another day. There will be two or three children around the house, they'll be speaking on the level of a two- or three- or five-year-old, and at some point they will want to get out and have some cultural refinement. They will want to experience some growing. So it is that the testimony meeting helps your wives to share their feelings with each other. It also helps those of you women who will be alone, who may not have a partner. You should go to Relief Society for the association you will find there. It will help every woman in the Church to grow, to have new experiences. Someday you will go to Relief Society and hear someone bear her testimony; it will make you feel as though life is worth it.

There are two major reasons why women don't go to Relief Society. First, women do not know how important it is to them individually for their growth, or they don't know how important it is for their families and for their companionship with their husbands. Second,

some priesthood holders do not support their wives and do not understand why it is important for them.

May I give just one last suggestion. When your companion is gone to Relief Society and you're all alone, you'll have some of the best "memory moments" with your children. That's also the time, maybe, to do a few dishes and to clean up the house a little bit, so that when she returns home she doesn't feel as though she has the weight of the world on her shoulders.

Many men feel that the physical part of their relationship in marriage is the most important part. But I want to tell each and everyone of you, very personally, that to clean a few dishes, vacuum a room, and have all of the kids in bed when mom comes home has got to be one of the most rewarding experiences your wife will ever have in marriage. It's a much better way, at times, of expressing your feelings than saying, "I love you."

You two also have to ask, as you travel through life in your marriage, "What are the anticipated problems if we don't follow the counsel which we've talked of today? What can we expect if we disregard the counsel of the Brethren, of the President of the Church, and of those who will counsel us on a temple marriage?" Thinking seriously about the answers to those questions may inspire us to do what is right.

In closing, I would like to give you my testimony. How I realize the importance of

setting your course, of knowing where you are going. I ask the Lord's blessings to be with you so that you will not lean on one another as a crutch, but you'll both stand strong. Strengthen each other. Ask for help as you pray each night. Please date extensively. Please know the kind of person you want to be with. Please make sure that you help those you come in contact with. Please point them in the direction of associating with many people.

And please make sure that none of you sets an artificial goal for those you are going to marry. If you say, "I'll go with you or marry you if you go on a mission, or if you'll marry in the temple," and if that isn't what they feel inside they want to do, fifteen or twenty years from now you may have a tragic circumstance. Make sure that you know before you get married what that person really wants to be inside. You can do that by seeing if he goes to his meetings and has a testimony and can talk to you about eternal goals, now.

I ask the Lord's blessings to be with you. I know that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ. I bear testimony to you that those moments in my life when I have been unhappy, depressed, or sad are when I have deviated, even in a minor degree, from the teachings of the Lord. That you might have true happiness and find the joy of a celestial marriage with a little heaven on earth is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.