

“Withstand Every Temptation of the Devil”

W. ROLFE KERR

You have assembled here on the Brigham Young University campus and at many other locations around the world in anticipation of hearing from Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. I am sorry to disappoint you. Elder Ballard is unable to be with you, and I am honored to have been asked to substitute for him. He wishes he were here, and I can assure you that I wish he were here as well. Again, I am honored to have been asked to substitute for him.

Exactly 50 years ago this very night, I was aboard an enormous and beautiful ocean liner approaching the docks of Southampton, England. I was about to commence my service as a missionary in the British Mission. At that time missionaries traveled to their foreign fields of labor by sea rather than by air. I do believe that Orville and Wilbur Wright had made their first flight by then, but it was still a long time ago.

I want you to know that I loved my mission. It meant so very much to me then and has continued through the years to be the symbol of so many things that are good in this life. The solidifying of my testimony was one of the greatest blessings of my mission. I had what I considered to be a strong testimony before I was called to serve, but teaching and testifying of divine truth caused that testimony to swell

within my heart and soul in a way as to sustain me through any trial or challenging situation. I don't know what I would do without the gospel. I will be forever grateful for my mission, for my testimony, and for the shield of protection I have felt through my faith in the Savior. That shield of faith has been my spiritual and moral protection through the years.

Faith in Jesus Christ, Our Best Defense Against Temptation

That thought leads me to the central idea that I would like to leave with you tonight. In the Book of Mormon we read of Alma's counsel and instruction to his son Helaman. Among other things, he admonished Helaman to “teach [the people] an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity.” He urged him to “preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.” And now listen to these words. Alma said, “Teach them to withstand every temptation of the devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Alma 37:32–33).

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Do you see and sense the meaning and the power in that for you—indeed, for all of us?

Alma continued his instruction to Helaman, saying:

Teach them to never be weary of good works, but to be meek and lowly in heart; for such shall find rest to their souls.

O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God. . . .

Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good. [Alma 37:34–35, 37]

This is marvelous and appropriate counsel for all of us, young or old.

The very best and most certain defense we have against the temptations of the devil is our faith in Christ, our faith in His great atoning sacrifice, our faith in and testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. With faith and testimony firmly and consciously in place, the fiery darts of the wicked one will not and cannot pierce our souls. I emphasize having faith and testimony not just firmly in place but consciously in place. If you are consciously thinking of the Savior, you will not allow temptations to overpower you. More important, if you have the Savior and your faith in Him firmly and consciously in your mind and your heart, you will not allow yourselves even to get into tempting situations. Said another way, let your faith in Christ keep you out of the devil's territory.

Should it be needed, let your faith in Christ prompt a "Joseph experience" in your life. You remember Joseph, he who was sold into Egypt and became the favored servant for Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Potiphar's wife had unholy intentions toward Joseph. But Joseph immediately and flatly refused and rejected her advances, saying, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). She pressed her intentions, and the scriptures tell us that Joseph fled, that he "got him[self] out" of that tempting situation

(verse 12). He withstood the temptations of the devil, even with his faith on the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Genesis 39:7–12.)

Children in elementary and primary schools around the world are taught the basic and essential elements of learning: reading, writing, and arithmetic. These are often referred to as "the three R's." Though the English letter *r* may not apply in all languages, we have all learned how to read, how to write, and how to solve basic mathematical problems. As I think about the basic and essential doctrines that underpin my faith, I again find three R's: resurrection, revelation, and restoration. In these we learn much of what the Lord would have us carry to the world. In these we learn of the Savior Jesus Christ and His Atonement. In these we learn of how God communicates through His chosen servants. In these we learn of the Prophet Joseph Smith and of the Restoration of the gospel. Though these three are not inclusive of all the wonderful and illuminating doctrines of the gospel, in these we can find the basis of a faith that can strengthen us in withstanding every temptation of the devil. Books have been written about the Resurrection, revelation, and the Restoration. Obviously I can only touch lightly on each of them here tonight. Think with me and visualize having these doctrinal truths so firmly and consciously in your minds and hearts as to provide that sure defense against evil.

The Resurrection

The doctrine of the Resurrection is as old as the foundations of the world. It was and is an essential part of our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness. The Lord taught Moses about His plan, including the Creation, the Fall of Adam, and the Atonement. Among many other things, He said, "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). It was in the plan that man would be redeemed from the Fall by and through the atoning sacrifice of the

Savior Jesus Christ. Through the Fall of Adam came physical and spiritual death, not just to Adam and Eve but to all mankind. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ came the glorious promise of resurrection from the dead for all who have lived or will yet live upon the earth. Paul the Apostle wrote:

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. [1 Corinthians 15:20–22]

Physical death, as we all know, is the separation of the spirit from the body. Spiritual death is a separation of our spirits from the presence of God by sin. The Savior's gift of the Resurrection removes the lasting effects of the physical death. All will be resurrected. Thus the immortality of man is provided as a free and unconditional gift through the grace of Christ. Immortality is life everlasting, whereas eternal life is life everlasting in the presence of God. To gain eternal life and overcome the effects of the spiritual death is also a gift from Christ, but this gift is conditional, requiring faithfulness and obedience on our part. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said:

Jesus' glorious Atonement is the central act in all of human history! It provides the universal Resurrection; it makes our personal repentance and forgiveness possible. . . .

*Christ gave us freely an enormous and unconditional gift: the universal Resurrection. However, Christ's proffer of the further gift of eternal life is conditional. . . . He sets the terms for receiving this great gift. ["Testifying of the Great and Glorious Atonement," *Ensign*, October 2001, 10–12]*

President Joseph Fielding Smith said:

The atonement of Jesus Christ is of a twofold nature. Because of it, all men are redeemed from mortal death and the grave, and will rise in the resurrection to immortality of the soul. Then again, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel, man will receive remission of individual sins, through the blood of Christ, and will inherit exaltation in the kingdom of God, which is eternal life. [Doctrines of Salvation, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 1:123]

Those who have suffered crippling injuries or who have been born with incapacitating handicaps are comforted by the marvelous promises of the Resurrection. Listen to these consoling words from the Book of Mormon:

Now, there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death.

The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame. [Alma 11:42–43]

Yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame. [Alma 40:23]

Even some of us with lesser handicaps are delighted with that verse of scripture.

The atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence. . . .

And thus God bringeth about his great and eternal purposes, which were prepared from the foundation of the world. And thus cometh about the salvation and the redemption of men. [Alma 42:23, 26]

In describing the blessings received through the Resurrection, President Joseph Fielding Smith said that resurrection saves man from the devil:

Immortality of the soul is the gift of God through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. If the Savior had not died for the world, man would have remained in his sins. There could have been no resurrection from the dead and the physical body would have gone down into the grave without redemption, while the spirit would have become subject to the devil and his angels eternally. [Doctrines of Salvation, 2:283]

The Resurrection not only saves us from the devil in the eternities, but our firm and conscious faith in the Savior and His atoning sacrifice can save us from the devil in our daily lives. I ask you if this helps you to understand the connection between the doctrine of the Resurrection and the scriptural counsel that we “withstand every temptation of the devil, with [our] faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Several years ago a fine young woman came to me as her stake president. She was troubled over some challenges she was facing at the time.

She said, “President Kerr, it’s so hard to be a Latter-day Saint.”

We discussed her reasons for feeling that way. Our conversation led quite naturally to a discussion of the Savior and of His suffering for each of us. We spoke of His Resurrection and of its implications for our lives now and in the eternities. We then spoke of the Savior’s explanation to some of His followers of what was expected of them as disciples. We read from the scriptures where some felt the demands of their discipleship were too hard, and they turned their backs on the Savior and walked no more with Him (see John 6:66).

The young sister sat quietly for a few thoughtful moments, and, then, with tears in her eyes, she said, “Oh, I couldn’t do that.”

When I suggested that there is more than one way to turn our backs on the Savior, the light seemed to turn on in her mind and heart.

She said, “Now I can see that if I truly love my Savior and keep Him in my mind and heart, I cannot violate His trust.”

Then she said, “I want to change what I said when we first began this conversation. I now know that it would be hard *not* to be a Latter-day Saint.”

Continuing Revelation

Now, let us turn to the doctrine of divine and continuing revelation. The Lord said, “And again, I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations” (D&C 52:14). An essential element in the Lord’s “pattern in all things” is the assurance we have of living prophets, seers, and revelators receiving divine revelation for the guidance and direction of the Church today. Personal revelation and inspiration are available to each of us through the Holy Spirit. But I am not speaking of that form of revelation. I am speaking of revelation through living prophets to and for the Church.

While serving in the British Mission, I was blessed to teach many people who loved the Bible and relied heavily on its divine message. As we taught the doctrine of continuing revelation, many responded with joy and wonderment—joy with the thought that God may be speaking again to chosen prophets but wonderment as to why they had not heard this divine principle taught in their own churches. They learned that continuing revelation was not only the source of divine truth but also the primary source of scripture. The recording and acceptance of newly revealed truths as scripture troubled those who believed the Bible to be the sole repository of all of God’s word. Yet the honest in heart embraced the doctrine of continuing revelation and new scripture as

consistent with biblical patterns they believed but had not fully understood.

Elder Mark E. Petersen, who served for many years as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, described the significance of revelation to and for the Church when he said:

It is an infallible sign of the true church that it has in it divinely chosen, living prophets to guide it, men who receive current revelation from God and whose recorded works become new scripture.

*It is an infallible sign of the true church also that it will produce new and additional scripture arising out of the ministrations of those prophets. This unfailing pattern of God is clearly made manifest through his dealings with his people from the beginning. [CR, April 1978, 95–96; or “Evidence of Things Not Seen,” *Ensign*, May 1978, 62]*

I feel that Elder Petersen captured in a profound way the message of continuing revelation.

The Lord reveals His will to His chosen prophets, seers, and revelators. As the Lord puts it into their hearts to teach that which they have received, the people are blessed with divine knowledge communicated through those revelations. Revealed truth is recorded, and in the Lord’s time and infinite wisdom, some of those revelations may be formally added to the canon of scripture.

The doctrine of continuing revelation, with its resulting new scripture, is a distinctive feature of the Restoration. It is descriptive of the very process by which the Restoration occurred. Amos in the Old Testament said, “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

The Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ was the result of many heaven-sent revelations. These revelations were given primarily to a latter-day prophet chosen, prepared, and ordained for that divine purpose. Our message to all the world is that Joseph Smith was

that chosen prophet. It is our witness that God has again spoken and is still speaking, revealing His secret unto His servants the living prophets.

A testimony of this truth is of enormous comfort and gives us unending confidence in the prophetic voice we are blessed to hear and read on a regular basis.

One of the highlights of my mission was my own personal experience with the doctrine of revelation. As I searched the scriptures daily in my effort to prepare myself to teach the people, I was taken by the wonder of the unfolding revelations of the Lord, both ancient and modern. I am not a doubter by nature, but I enjoy the search for scriptural and logical evidences of the beliefs that have come to me by study and by faith. For a time my scriptural search was dominated by a logical premise that I had formulated in my mind. I had thought, “If the claims of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regarding continuing revelation are sound, the means by which revelations were received by the Prophet Joseph Smith must be consistent with the means by which revelations were received by Old and New Testament prophets and apostles.” Now, do you understand the premise? I needed to know that there was that consistency between how modern-day revelations were received and how revelations were received in ancient times.

Time this evening does not allow me to describe all that I found in that search, but let me say to you that the Lord’s pattern became very clear. Revelations to prophets have come by very consistent means. These means can be described and defined with different terminology and may be divided or grouped differently, but the distinct pattern is there. I identified five very specific means by which revelations have been given to God’s prophets. I found multiple examples of each of those throughout the scriptures. This pattern is consistently found in all the scriptures, ancient and modern. Maybe on another occasion I can talk about the five means

of revelation and show you that consistent pattern of those scriptures, ancient and modern.

The knowledge of this glorious truth strengthened my faith then and continues even today to strengthen my faith now. To know that we have a living prophet who receives revelations from God—just as Abraham and Moses and Isaiah and Peter and Paul and others did—is of enormous comfort and reassurance.

Each of you must come to your own knowledge and testimony of this divine principle. But you can have every confidence in the testimony that I am sharing with you tonight. Even now you can keep firmly and consciously in your minds an awareness and conviction that God is speaking to His chosen and living prophets today just as He did anciently. A testimony of the doctrine of continuing revelation will bolster your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and thus strengthen you in your resolve to withstand every temptation of the devil.

If you should face a moment of serious temptation, force yourself to think of President Gordon B. Hinckley. Think of him as a prophet, seer, and revelator who receives direct revelation from the Lord for the Church. Think of the revelation he received regarding the construction of small temples all around the world, making the sacred blessings of the temple available to an ever greater number of the members of the Church. Allow the conscious thought of a living prophet receiving current revelation regarding sacred temples to turn you away from that tempting moment and preserve your worthiness to receive those sacred temple blessings. We do indeed “believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Articles of Faith 1:9).

Restoration of the Gospel

We have talked, and I hope you have thought deeply, about the Resurrection and about revelation. Let us now talk about

the Restoration. We are here because of the Restoration. While a basic knowledge of the Resurrection and of revelation can be had from ancient scripture, most of what we know about these important doctrines has come as a result of the Restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith. The message of the Restoration is that God lives, Jesus is the living Christ, the gospel has been restored to the earth in its fulness, Joseph Smith truly was and is a modern-day prophet of God, Gordon B. Hinckley is a living prophet today, and the Book of Mormon is the word of God, standing now and forever with the Bible as one in the hands of the Lord.

There would have been no need for a restoration had there not first been a loss of truth, which occurred not many years following the Savior’s earthly ministry. That loss of truth, known as the Great Apostasy, was seen and foretold by Old and New Testament prophets. The Lord established His Church in all its purity, and He bestowed the holy priesthood upon His disciples. Now is not the time for detailing the causes of the Apostasy and loss of the priesthood, but even the most casual look at religious history will affirm its reality. The Old Testament prophet Amos prophesied of this loss of truth. He said:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord:

And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.
[Amos 8:11–12]

Not long after the Savior’s Ascension into heaven, Peter foresaw the Restoration. He said:

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

And he shall 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]

Speaking of the Second Coming of the Savior, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). It was known that there would be both a falling away and a restoration before the Second Coming.

These prophecies and many others not mentioned have truly been fulfilled, and we are the beneficiaries of the great blessings flowing from the Lord’s hand in our lives. President Gordon B. Hinckley said:

These are the days of restitution. These are the days of restoration spoken of in the Holy Bible plainly and forcefully by Peter the Apostle and by Paul. I repeat, you and I are a part of prophecy fulfilled, a part of the divine plan of the God of heaven, that there should be a falling away and that there must be a restoration. [“Inspirational Thoughts,” Ensign, June 2004, 4]

The restoration of all things as foretold by ancient prophets of God did indeed occur through the ministry and heavenly manifestations of God the Father; His Son, Jesus Christ; Peter, James, and John; John the Baptist; Moses; Elijah; Moroni; and others of the Lord’s prophets in ancient times. Joseph Smith was fore-ordained to his sacred role as the instrument through whom God would bring to pass the Restoration of the gospel in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times. Even the Savior Himself bore witness of this truth. He said:

Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun.,

and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments; . . .

. . . that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets . . .

That faith also might increase in the earth;

That mine everlasting covenant might be established;

That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers. [D&C 1:17–18, 21–23]

What more can be said? This is the Savior’s own testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith! He spoke to him from heaven and gave him commandments. Did you also notice that one line? “That faith also might increase in the earth.” The Restoration of the gospel stands as a bulwark to our faith in our defense against the designs of the evil one. It is my prayer that you will keep these truths firmly and conscientiously in your minds and in your hearts. I plead with you, even as King Benjamin pled with his people when he said:

Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things. [Mosiah 5:15]

Conclusion

Let me conclude with a summarizing quote from President Gordon B. Hinckley:

This is God’s holy work. It is divine in its origin and in its doctrine. Jesus Christ [the resurrected Lord and Savior] stands as its head. He is our immortal Savior and Redeemer. His revelation is the source of our doctrine, our faith, our teaching, in fact the underlying pattern of our lives. Joseph Smith was an instrument in the hands of the Almighty in bringing to pass this Restoration.

And that basic element of revelation is with the Church today as it was in Joseph's day.

Our individual testimonies of these truths are the basis of our faith. We must nurture them. We must cultivate them. We can never forsake them. We can never lay them aside. Without them we have nothing. With them we have everything. [CR, April 2001, 111–12; or "Good-Bye for Another Season," Ensign, May 2001, 85]

I leave with you my witness of the divinity of the Savior. He lives! I testify that the reality of the Resurrection, the relevance of revelation, and the reliability of the Restoration will increase your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and help you withstand every temptation of the devil. I leave with you my testimony, my love, and my blessing to that end, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.