

Jesus Christ and Him Crucified

BRUCE R. MCCONKIE

We have assembled here tonight in the spirit of worship and gratitude and thanksgiving, desiring, I think, to be fed the bread of life, to have the guidance and edifying, uplifting influence of the Holy Spirit. We need very much to be so guided. If I can be given utterance and be guided by the power of the Spirit, what I shall say will be what the Lord wants said; it will be what he would say if he personally were here. It will be the mind and will and voice of the Lord and the power of God unto salvation. And if each of you can have that same Spirit resting upon you, then you will have that burning assurance and feeling in your soul that will certify that the truths taught are accurate and right, and that, if we live our lives in conformity to them, we'll be making progress along the path leading to eternal life in our Father's kingdom.

Now, I've left my mind free, hoping that proper inspiration might be given, but I've thought that if I am properly guided, I shall take this sentence that Paul wrote and use it as a theme or a text. He said, "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). That, then, is my subject: Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

To set the stage and lay a foundation for what appropriately might be said about this

subject, I shall read three quotations. One is from the Doctrine and Covenants; in it the Lord says:

Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me. [D&C 19:23]

The second, Nephi writing, is from the Book of Mormon:

Believe in Christ, and . . . be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. . . .

And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may look for a remission of their sins. . . .

. . . believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the Holy One of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul; and if ye do this ye shall in nowise be cast out. [2 Nephi 25:23, 26, 29]

Bruce R. McConkie was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 5 September 1976.

The third quotation, from the Prophet Joseph Smith, gives us information that he learned by translating the papyrus, a portion of which is published as the book of Abraham:

Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organization of this earth, and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth; these personages, according to Abraham's record, are called: God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer; and God the third, the Witness or Testator. [Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 190]

Now, we are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We have taken upon ourselves his name in the waters of baptism. We renew the covenant therein made when we partake of the sacrament. If we have been born again, we have become the sons and daughters of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are members of his family. We are obligated and expected to live by the standards of the family. Because of that family membership, that close association, we have the privilege of an intimate association with him. We have been given the gift of the Holy Ghost, which is the constant companionship of that member of the Godhead based on faithfulness. And that Holy Spirit has as one of his chief missions to bear record of the Father and the Son, and to reveal to us, in a way that cannot be controverted or questioned, his divine sonship and the glorious truths that are in him.

Salvation is in Christ. We have set ourselves apart from the generality of mankind and have become his witnesses. And so tonight, if we may be properly guided, and have all our thoughts and attentions centered on this matter, so that we will be mutually edified, I shall call attention to some of the great, basic realities in the eternal scheme of things. And as we shall see, all of these things, as far as we are now concerned, center in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Truth and Heresy About the Godhead

Now, to begin with, we start with God, our Heavenly Father, who is here named God the first, the Creator. And we have to understand that he is a holy and perfected and exalted person; that he is a being in whose image man is created; that he has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; and that we are literally his spirit children, the Lord Jesus being the firstborn. I suggest that the greatest truth in all eternity, bar none, is that there is a God in heaven who is a personal being, in whose image man is made, and that we are his spirit children. We must build on that rock foundation before any progression ever begins in the spiritual realm. We first believe in God our Heavenly Father.

I suggest also that the greatest heresy that was ever devised by an evil power was the heresy that defines the nature and kind of being that God is as a spirit essence that fills immensity; as a being without body, parts, or passions; as something that is incomprehensible, uncreated, and unknowable. The greatest truth is God; the greatest heresy is the doctrine that recites the opposite of the truth as to God's person.

I suggest that the second greatest truth in all eternity is that Christ our Lord is the Redeemer; that he was foreordained in the councils of eternity to come down here and work out the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice; that because of what he did we are ransomed from the effects of the temporal and spiritual death that came into the world by the fall of Adam. Because of what he did, all of us gain immortality, meaning that we shall come forth in the resurrection. And all of us have the hope, the potential, the possibility, to gain eternal life in addition to immortality, meaning that we can become like God our Heavenly Father. That is the second greatest truth in all eternity.

The second greatest heresy in all eternity is the doctrine that denies the divine sonship,

that sets up a system that says you can give lip-service to the name of Christ, but you are saved by grace alone without efforts and without work on your part.

Now I suggest, conformable to what the Prophet said about God the third, who is the Witness or Testator, that the third greatest truth in all eternity is that the Holy Spirit of God, a personage of spirit, a member of the Godhead, has power to reveal eternal truth to the heart and soul and mind of man. And that revelation—known first as a testimony, and then known as the general receipt of truth in the spiritual field—that testimony is the great thing that man needs to lead him on a course back to our Father in heaven.

Since that is the third greatest truth in all eternity, it follows that the third greatest and most serious heresy in all eternity is the doctrine that denies that the Holy Spirit of God reveals truth to the human soul, and that denies that there are gifts of the spirit, that there are miracles and powers and graces and good things that the Lord by his Spirit pours out upon mortal men.

We ought to have in our hearts an overflowing feeling of gratitude and thanksgiving. We praise the Lord our God, meaning the Father, because he created us. If he had not created us, we would not be; neither would the earth, or the sidereal heavens, or the universe, or anything else. If there had been no eternal God and no creation, there would be nothing. And because we exist, we ought in our souls to have an infinite degree of gratitude and thanksgiving to God our Heavenly Father.

Now, secondly, we ought to have an infinite degree of gratitude and thanksgiving to Christ the Lord, because he worked out the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice and put into operation the terms and conditions of the Father's plan. If there had been no atonement of Christ, there would be no resurrection. And if there had been no atonement of Christ, there would be no eternal life, and hence our bodies would

have lain forever in the dust and our spirits everlastingly been cast out from the presence of God, and we would have become like the devil and his angels. What I am saying is that, through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, the plan of the Father became operative. Its terms and conditions were put into force; they were given efficacy and validity. And so we ought to rejoice and have thanksgiving and gratitude in our souls to the Lord Jesus, who redeemed us.

Now, thirdly, by virtue of obedience to the laws that are ordained and by becoming clean and spotless and pure, because the Spirit will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle, we get in a position to receive revelation by the power of the Holy Spirit. Once we are in tune, then we become part of the family of the Lord Jesus. We partake of the same spirit that he possesses; we begin to believe as he believed, to act as he acted, to speak as he spoke. As a consequence, we get in a position to gain that glory and eternal life which he, as our prototype, has already gained. And so, thirdly, we rejoice in what has come to us by the power of the Holy Ghost and have, again, an infinite gratitude where those things are concerned.

The Plan of Salvation

God our Heavenly Father ordained and established the plan of salvation. Joseph Smith expressed it in these words. He said, "God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 354). God is exalted and omnipotent and enthroned; he has all power, all might, and all dominion. He lives in the family unit, and the name of the kind of life that he lives is eternal life. And so if we advance and progress and go forward until we become like him, we then become, like Christ, inheritors of eternal life in the kingdom of God. That is our aim and our goal.

Hence there is this thing which Paul calls “the gospel of God,” meaning that the Father ordained and established the plan of salvation. But then Paul says, “Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3), meaning that Christ adopted the Father’s plan. He made it his own. He espoused it. He became the advocate of salvation, the leader in the cause of salvation—all because he was chosen to be born into the world as God’s Son.

All of this was known and taught and understood in the great eternities that went before. We all heard the gospel preached. We knew its terms and conditions. We knew what would be involved in this mortal probation. We knew that it was necessary to come here and get a mortal body as a step toward gaining an immortal body, one of flesh and bones. We knew that when we came here we would need to be tried and examined and tested. We’d need to undergo probationary experiences when we were outside the presence of God, when we walked by faith rather than by sight, when the spirit was housed in a tabernacle of clay and subject to the lusts and appetites and passions of mortality. This we all knew. And then our Father sent forth the great decree through the councils of eternity, “Whom shall I send to be my son, to work out the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice, to be born into mortality with the power of immortality, to inherit from me the power to work out the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice?” He got two volunteers. Christ the Lord said, “Father, thy will be done” (see Moses 4:1–3). That is, “I will go down and do what thou hast ordained and sacrifice myself. I will be the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Lucifer wanted to modify the Father’s plan so radically that we could almost say he offered a new system of salvation. He wanted to deny all men their agency, to save all men and, in return, receive the power and dignity and glory of the Father.

He wanted to take the place of the Father. The decision was then made: “I will send the first.”

The plan was put into operation. Part of it was the creation of this earth. Then came its peopling. We are all the sons and daughters of Father Adam; all of us are eternal beings, offspring of Deity. Our mortal bodies have been made from the dust of the earth. We’re here, having mortal bodies, being examined and tried and tested to see if we will walk uprightly and keep the commandments.

Now, our first obligation is to believe in Christ and accept him literally and completely and fully for what he is. We believe in Christ when we believe the doctrine he teaches, the words that he speaks, the message that he proclaims. When he came in the flesh as Mary’s son, the account says that he “went about . . . preaching the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 9:35), meaning that his message was a revelation to people in that day of the plan of salvation, of the things that they had to do to overcome the world, to perfect their lives, and to qualify to go back with him to the presence of the everlasting Father.

So, first of all, we believe in Christ. And the test as to whether we believe in him is whether we believe his words and whether we believe those whom he hath sent—the apostles and prophets of all the ages. And then, having believed, we have the obligation of conforming to the truths that we have thus learned. If we do conform we begin to grow in spiritual graces. We add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance and patience and godliness and all of the other attributes and characteristics that are written in the revelations (see 2 Peter 1:5–7). So step by step and degree by degree we begin to become like God our Heavenly Father.

We do not work out our salvation in a moment; it doesn’t come to us in an instant, suddenly. Gaining salvation is a process. Paul says, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). To some

members of the Church who had been baptized and who were on the course leading to eternal life, he said, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Romans 13:11). That is, "We have made some progress along the straight and narrow path. We are going forward, and if we continue in that direction, eternal life will be our everlasting reward."

We start out in the direction of eternal life when we join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We enter in at a gate, and the name of the gate is repentance and baptism. We thereby get on a path, and the name of the path is the straight and narrow path. And then if we endure to the end, meaning if we keep the commandments of God after baptism, we go up that straight and narrow path, and at its end is a reward that is named eternal life. All of this is available because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ. If he had not come, there would be no hope or no possibility under any circumstance for any man either to be resurrected or to have eternal life. Salvation comes by the mercy and the love and the condescension of God. In other words, it comes by the grace of God, meaning that our Lord made it available. But he has done his work, and we must now do ours; and we have the obligation to endure to the end, to keep the commandments, to work out our salvation, and that is what we are in the process of doing in the church and the kingdom of God on earth.

The Process of Achieving Eternal Life

We say that a man has to be born again, meaning that he has to die as pertaining to the unrighteous things in the world. Paul said, "Crucify the old man of sin and come forth in a newness of life" (see Romans 6:6). We are born again when we die as pertaining to unrighteousness and when we live as pertaining to the things of the Spirit. But that doesn't happen in an instant, suddenly. That also is a process. Being born again is a gradual thing, except in a few isolated instances that are so

miraculous they get written up in the scriptures. As far as the generality of the members of the Church are concerned, we are born again by degrees, and we are born again to added light and added knowledge and added desires for righteousness as we keep the commandments.

The same thing is true of being sanctified. Those who go to the celestial kingdom of heaven have to be sanctified, meaning that they become clean and pure and spotless. They've had evil and sin and iniquity burned out of their souls as though by fire, and the figurative expression there is "the baptism of fire." Here again it is a *process*. Nobody is sanctified in an instant, suddenly. But if we keep the commandments and press forward with steadfastness after baptism, then degree by degree and step by step we sanctify our souls until that glorious day when we're qualified to go where God and angels are.

So it is with the plan of salvation. We have to become perfect to be saved in the celestial kingdom. But nobody becomes perfect in this life. Only the Lord Jesus attained that state, and he had an advantage that none of us has. He was the Son of God, and he came into this life with a spiritual capacity and a talent and an inheritance that exceeded beyond all comprehension what any of the rest of us was born with. Our revelations say that he was like unto God in the premortal life and he was, under the Father, the creator of worlds without number. That Holy Being was the Holy One of Israel anciently and he was the Sinless One in mortality. He lived a perfect life, and he set an ideal example. This shows that we can strive and go forward toward that goal, but no other mortal—not the greatest, prophets nor the mightiest apostles nor any of the righteous saints of any of the ages—has ever been perfect, but we must become perfect to gain a celestial inheritance. As it is with being born again, and as it is with sanctifying our souls, so becoming perfect in Christ is a process.

We begin to keep the commandments today, and we keep more of them tomorrow, and we go from grace to grace, up the steps of the ladder, and we thus improve and perfect our souls. We can become perfect in some minor things. We can be perfect in the payment of tithing. If we pay one-tenth of our interest annually into the tithing funds of the Church, if we do it year in and year out, and desire to do it, and have no intent to withhold, and if we would do it regardless of what arose in our lives, then in that thing we are perfect. And in that thing and to that extent we are living the law as well as Moroni or the angels from heaven could live it. And so degree by degree and step by step we start out on the course to perfection with the objective of becoming perfect as God our Heavenly Father is perfect, in which eventuality we become inheritors of eternal life in his kingdom.

As members of the Church, if we chart a course leading to eternal life; if we begin the processes of spiritual rebirth, and are going in the right direction; if we chart a course of sanctifying our souls, and degree by degree are going in that direction; and if we chart a course of becoming perfect, and, step by step and phase by phase, are perfecting our souls by overcoming the world, then it is absolutely guaranteed—there is no question whatever about it—we shall gain eternal life. Even though we have spiritual rebirth ahead of us, perfection ahead of us, the full degree of sanctification ahead of us, if we chart a course and follow it to the best of our ability in this life, then when we go out of this life we'll continue in exactly that same course. We'll no longer be subject to the passions and the appetites of the flesh. We will have passed successfully the tests of this mortal probation and in due course we'll get the fulness of our Father's kingdom—and that means eternal life in his everlasting presence.

The Prophet told us that there are many things that people have to do, even after the

grave, to work out their salvation. We're not going to be perfect the minute we die. But if we've charted a course, if our desires are right, if our appetites are curtailed and bridled, and if we believe in the Lord and are doing to the very best of our abilities what we ought to do, we'll go on to everlasting salvation, which is the fulness of eternal reward in our Father's kingdom.

Hope and Rejoicing

I think we ought to have hope; I think we ought to have rejoicing. We can talk about the principles of salvation and say how many there are and how people have to meet these standards. And it may thereby seem hard and difficult and beyond the capacity of mortals so to obtain. But we need not take that approach. We ought to realize that we have the same appetites and passions that all of the saints and righteous people had in the dispensations that have gone before. They were no different than we are. They overcame the flesh. They gained the knowledge of God. They understood about Christ and salvation. They had the revelations of the Holy Spirit to their souls certifying of the divine sonship and of the prophetic ministry of whatever prophets ministered among them. And as a consequence they worked out their salvation.

Occasionally in the overall perspective someone came along who so lived that he was translated, but that's not particularly for our day and generation. When we die our obligation is to go into the spirit world and continue to preach the gospel there. So, as far as people now living are concerned, our obligation is to believe the truth, and live the truth, and chart a course to eternal life. And if we do it, we get peace and joy and happiness in this life; and, when we go into the eternal realms ahead, we continue there to work in the cause of righteousness. And we will not fail! We will go on to eternal reward.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said that no man can commit the unpardonable sin after he departs this life. Of course he can't; that's part of the testing of this mortal probation. And on that same basis, anybody who is living uprightly and has integrity and devotion, if he's doing all that he can here, then when he leaves this sphere he's going to go into the paradise of God and have rest and peace—that is, rest and peace as far as the troubles and turmoils and vicissitudes and anxieties of this life are concerned. But he'll continue to labor and work on the Lord's errand, and eventually he'll come up in the Resurrection of the Just. He'll get an immortal body, meaning that body and spirit will be inseparably connected. That soul will never again see corruption. Never again will there be death, but what is equally as glorious, or more so, that soul will go on to eternal life in the kingdom of God. And eternal life means the continuation of the family unit. Eternal life means inheriting, receiving, and possessing the fulness of the Father, the power and might and creative ability and all that he has that enabled him to create worlds without number and to be the progenitor of an infinite number of spirit progeny.

Now, we can't really conceive of how glorious and wondrous all these things are. We can get some glimmering; we can get a little understanding. We know that they are available because God the Creator established the plan of salvation. We know that they are available because God the Redeemer put into force and gave efficacy and validity to all of the terms and conditions of that eternal plan. And we know that they can be revealed and known to us because God the Witness or Testator bears witness, certifies, testifies to the spirit that is within us in a way that cannot be controverted, that the things of which we speak are true.

The Crucifixion

Now I should like to speak of Jesus Christ and him crucified, of the atonement of the

Lord. The Atonement was worked out in a garden outside Jerusalem's walls, a garden called Gethsemane. It was worked out in a way that is totally beyond our comprehension. We do not understand how. We know some of the why. We know that it did occur. We know that, in a way incomprehensible to a finite intellect, the Son of God took upon himself the sins of all men on conditions of repentance. That is, he paid the penalty. He satisfied the demands of justice. He made mercy available to us. Mercy cometh because of the Atonement. Mercy is for the penitent. Mercy is for the repentant. Everyone else has to suffer for his own sins and pay to the full extent the demands of justice. But our eternal Redeemer, and blessed be his name, has done for us what no one else could, and he did it because he was God's Son and because he possessed the power of immortality. He has taken our sins upon him on conditions of repentance. Repentance means that we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that we forsake our sins, that we come into the church and kingdom of God on earth and receive the Holy Ghost. Repentance is far more than reformation. Repentance is a gift of God, and it comes to faithful members of the Church. We get it by the power of the Holy Ghost.

The cleansing process that occurs in our lives comes because we receive the cleansing power of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is a revelator, and the Holy Ghost is a sanctifier. The Holy Ghost reveals truth to every human soul that obeys the law. Obedience qualifies us to know the truth. And then the Holy Ghost sanctifies the human soul, so that we become clean and spotless and eventually are qualified to go where God and Christ are.

Gratitude and Thanksgiving

Now I say, as we turn our attentions and our thoughts to these infinitely great and wondrous and glorious eternal truths, that we ought to have in our souls gratitude and

adoration and thanksgiving, beyond any pmeasure of comprehension, to God our Father, who created us, to Christ our Lord, who redeemed us, and to the Holy Spirit of God, by whose instrumentality we come to know of the truth and verity of these eternal principles upon which salvation rests.

I've recited these principles, or at least I have talked about them. I haven't taken occasion to read any revelations. We could do that, but it doesn't seem needed or appropriate under the circumstances. Let me just suggest to you that the doctrine I have taught and the explanations I have made are scriptural and they are true.

I can bear witness of their truth and verity because I know by the power of the Holy Spirit what is involved. And if the Spirit has been poured out on you, as I think it has upon many of you, then you also know by the power of that Spirit of the truth and verity of the things about which we are now speaking. And since you know them, then light and truth and knowledge have come into your soul and you have an obligation not only to believe, but also to conform your life to the things that you believe and thereby to chart the glorious and wondrous course leading to eternal life.

I bear record and testimony that what we have been teaching here is true; we are obligated to bear testimony whenever we speak by the power of the Spirit. I say in plain, simple, unambiguous words that the Lord Jesus is the Son of the living God; that he came into the world to be lifted up upon the cross, and to be crucified for the sins of the world; that he was born with the power of immortality on the one hand and the power of mortality on the other; and that thereby he voluntarily laid down his life and then took it up again, and in some way (incomprehensible to us) worked out the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice. These things are true!

What a wondrous thing it is to be members of a church and kingdom established by God himself, where these truths are known and understood and taught. I came in here tonight

and looked at this wonderful student body, some twenty-four thousand of you assembled for this devotional service, and I thought to myself about what the voice of God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. He said, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).

We just happen to be members of God's true Church, and we have apostles and prophets and living oracles to teach and bear record of the truth. We also have elders and witnesses almost without number to reveal and explain these things to us. We are walking where the prophets of God have walked. We go to school at an institution that is guided by the spirit of inspiration, where the hand of the Lord is involved. And if we might paraphrase what his voice said to Moses, we might well say for all of us, with reference to our labors and works at this great institution, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou walkest is holy ground."

The Lord's hand is in this work. He wants us to be saved. He is pleading with us to keep the commandments. We are in an environment and a climate and living under circumstances where we have every opportunity so to do. And the most glorious, wondrous thing about this whole system of revealed religion is that it is true. You ponder that in your heart. There is nothing connected with our whole system of revealed religion to compare with the simple, pure, unadulterated fact that it's true. And because it's true, it will save a human soul. Because it's true, it will prevail. In due course the knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. God grant us the insight to live in harmony with the truth. God grant us the revelations of his Holy Spirit so that with one voice we may testify of the truth and renew our determinations to live in harmony with it. And I testify of this truth in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.