

# *The Covenant People of God*

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I am deeply touched, my young brothers and sisters, by the spirit that is here and by your presence and the purpose for which you are here. I am grateful for the presence of President Holland and his lovely wife. I am grateful also for President Wheelwright, who, as he says, has been a lifelong friend. My wife and I met him and his wife accidentally in Palestine one time, and he escorted us through the Holy Land and did it like the expert that he is. We love the Wheelwrights; we love you all.

I was tremendously impressed when President Joe Christensen, the president of our Missionary Training Center, told me that here tonight there are 2,211 missionaries preparing to go on missions, the largest number of missionaries ever to be assembled under one roof. May I have permission, President Wheelwright, to ask these missionaries to stand so that we may see them? We are grateful for your marvelous dedication and grateful for your response to our calls to go to the various parts of the world. We wish you Godspeed in all of the work you have before you. May I ask also that President Christensen stand? I would like to express again the great appreciation we feel for President Joe Christensen and his wife and all of those associated with them in this missionary training school.

This morning at seven o'clock, the Counsel of the Twelve met in their fourth-floor assembly room in the Salt Lake Temple. We were there from seven until twelve in a very moving, spiritual meeting. The sacrament was passed, and we all partook of it in a most solemn manner and were grateful for the privilege. We were glad that we could again renew our covenants with Almighty God, and with his beloved son, Jesus Christ, to serve him and keep his commandments; we were glad for the great opportunity of having his Spirit to be with us. And we had the Spirit in rich measure.

Behind the pulpit in that little meeting room is a beautiful mural depicting the Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane. We talked about Gethsemane and about the Savior. Brother Bruce R. McConkie spoke at length about the tremendous suffering that the Savior went through. He did it in a very touching way and with great solemnity, reminding us how the Savior went into the Garden of Gethsemane,

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took three of the disciples with him, and asked them to watch and pray, and then went further away to pray alone.

Most of the pictures that depict the Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane show him kneeling in prayer. The one in the room in which we met shows him kneeling at an olive tree. It was painted by Harry Anderson. (You have seen a number of other paintings by Harry Anderson; he has done a magnificent work painting for us a series of murals of the life of Christ.) In this mural he has the Savior in a kneeling pose. Brother McConkie called our attention to the fact that the suffering incident to the atonement started there in Gethsemane and that the Savior suffered so dreadfully that drops of blood came from his pores.

Brother McConkie then told us that the Savior was not kneeling in that prayer. The suffering he endured was so infinite, so much beyond our understanding, that even he fell prostrate upon the ground. He didn't try to kneel, and as he lay prostrate upon the ground he cried out to his father that if it were possible, "Let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26: 39).

Attention was called to the fact that he had prayed three times in this way; and then came Judas, the betrayer, who had probably been possessed by a devil and who, for thirty pieces of silver, was willing to sell the Son of God. He came up and gave the Lord the traitor's kiss. Brother McConkie mentioned that according to the scholars' definition of the traitor's kiss it was not just an ordinary kiss on the cheek, but something very effusive. If Judas had followed the usual custom he would have come up to the Savior and embraced him vigorously and then kissed him affectionately.

You remember that Peter, who loved the Lord so much, raised a sword. It seems unusual that any of the Lord's disciples would have had a sword, doesn't it? But he had a sword, and he pulled it out and in self defense of the Savior struck at the servant of the high

priest, a man named Malchus, and cut off his ear. The Savior then healed this man. That was the last miracle of healing that the Savior performed. Then he turned to Peter and told him to put away his sword, for he that raises the sword shall die by the sword.

Then the Savior, who had prayed so earnestly in the Garden that the cup might pass by if it were the will of the Father, turned to Peter as he rebuked him for using the sword and said, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11).

Those words have been impressed on my mind all my life as I have realized what the Savior was talking about. Here he was enduring the terrible suffering of the Atonement. He had prayed to be relieved, if it were possible, but God's will was that he go through with it because the salvation of each of us depends on the Atonement of the Savior. Without the Savior there is no Atonement. There is no salvation. Without the Savior we wouldn't be alive; we wouldn't even exist. But there he was willing to take upon himself the suffering of all mankind. And he in his infinite mind knew what infinite suffering would be; he had already partaken of it in the Garden, and now he was to face the cross and have more of it. But he said, humbly and apparently gently, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

I would like to read the Savior's own description of his suffering as it appears in one of the revelations given to the Prophet Joseph Smith. You remember that in this revelation the Savior taught the great doctrine of repentance and that his saving blood relieves us of the terrible sins that we have committed. We also learn that if we will repent, the suffering that normally would be exacted from us for our sins will be paid for by the blood of the Savior on the cross. Therefore, he cried out and said, "Repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you

know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not" (D&C 19:15).

We are taught in the Bible that with every law there is a punishment attached. If we break a divine law, punishment is required. But if we really repent and serve the Lord and keep his commandments from then on, the suffering of Christ pays that penalty. He took our sins upon himself and thus became our Savior. The Lord went on to say,

*Behold, I God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;*

*But if they would not repent, they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—*

*Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. [D&C 19:16–19]*

The Savior's persecutors took him to the cross after the experience in Gethsemane and nailed him to it. For about three hours, according to the scripture, he was suspended from the cross, still suffering the pain of the sins of all men that started in Gethsemane and continued and concluded on the cross. There he died for everybody if they would but serve him and keep his commandments.

You remember that this doctrine was also taught when we were given the sacramental prayers. I would like to read one of these prayers, if I may do so with the proper solemnity and reverence.

*O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him and*

*keep his commandments which he has given them; that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen. [D&C 20:77]*

Do you read that prayer in the scripture and then analyze it and come to understand what it means to each of us?

Every member of the Church in this room has probably partaken of the sacrament this very day. You have partaken of the bread that was broken in remembrance of the broken flesh and have drunk of the cup in remembrance of the blood spilt on the cross. What went through your mind as you did so? Did you listen carefully to the prayer on the bread? What does it say? It says that we "witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father," that we not only take upon ourselves his name, the name of Christ, and really become his, but that we pledge to high heaven, by the very crucifixion, that we will always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given us. Could there be a more solemn covenant than that?

I believe that the two most sacred ordinances in the Church are the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and baptism by immersion for the remission of sins. The reason I believe they are the most sacred is that they both relate directly to the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper reminds us of the terrible crucifixion and of his terrible death and suffering as described in the scriptures.

The world at large has the idea that the symbol of Christianity is the cross, but it's no such thing. The cross is the symbol of the cruelest form of torture and execution that the Romans could devise; that is what the cross is for. Christ did not give us the cross as the symbol of his great Atonement. He gave us, instead, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and told us to partake of that bread and drink of that cup in remembrance of his blood and his broken flesh. Did he not give us that great

ordinance emblematic of the suffering on the cross? Of course he did. We get it from no other place. He did not say to venerate the cross, he said to partake of the sacrament and always remember him and pledge to high heaven that we will always keep the commandments of Almighty God.

What was the other part of the Atonement? It was the breaking of the bands of death to bring about the resurrection. After his death the Lord Jesus Christ went to the spirits in prison, but his body went into the grave of Joseph of Arimathea and was there until the third day. And then what happened? He was resurrected. His full life came back to his body, just as our full life will come back to our bodies.

In the resurrection every one of us will be raised up, no longer subject to death. We will have the very same body that we now have; it will be a physical resurrection of flesh and bones; we will not be resurrected in some other way. That is the kind of resurrection we will have, and that is the kind of resurrection Jesus Christ had.

Do you remember what happened when Christ appeared to his disciples after the resurrection? They thought that they were seeing a spirit or a ghost. He tried to convince them that he was real and physical, a corporeal being, saying, "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39).

Do you remember when he came to the American continent and appeared before 2,500 Nephites and announced that he was the resurrected Christ? He had been resurrected in Palestine; now he came and visited the Americas. We have recorded in the Book of Mormon that 2,500 people lined up and approached him, and he allowed them to handle the marks of the crucifixion in his hands and feet and side.

This resurrection was a reality. And baptism by immersion for the remission of sins

performed by somebody having the proper authority was the symbol of that resurrection. Why baptism by immersion? Was he not placed in the grave? And did he not come forth from the grave? We are buried with him in baptism, as Paul said to the Romans, and we come forth out of the watery grave in baptism just as he came forth out of the tomb in his resurrection (see Romans 6:3–4).

Baptism is always performed by immersion, and no other form of baptism is baptism because immersion represents the burial of the Christ in the tomb and his coming forth in resurrection. That is why these two ordinances are so significant. Both are directly related to the Atonement, and both have saving power.

There is a covenant in baptism too, and it is a most serious covenant. Here is what we read in the Doctrine and Covenants:

*All those who humble themselves before God, and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, and witness before the Church that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, and truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins, shall be received by baptism into his Church. [D&C 20:37]*

So we enter into a covenant when we are baptized, do we not? And every member of the Church here has entered into that covenant. And in that covenant we took upon ourselves that name of Christ for the first time, later to take it upon us each time we partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. As we took upon ourselves his name in baptism we made a pledge, we determined—the scripture uses the word "determination"—to serve him to the end and truly manifest by our works that we have received of the Spirit of Christ.

My point is that the Latter-day Saints are the covenant people of God. We often say that

the Jews are the covenant people of God, and they are in one sense. They are the covenant people in that they are descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through Judah, one of the twelve sons. But they have not made personal covenants with God, as far as we know. Their covenant is the covenant of Abraham, that through Abraham they shall be blessed. In that respect, we are just as much the covenant people of God as the Jews are because we are descended through Joseph of Egypt.

Our covenants with God are greater than those of the Jews for two reasons. First, when Jacob laid his hands upon Joseph and his two sons, he gave them a patriarchal blessing that far exceeded anything that ever went to Judah or any of the others. He gave to Joseph and Ephraim and Manasseh a patriarchal blessing that they would “grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (Gen. 48:16).

Ephraim was given the birthright of the tribes of Israel; that is why we are of Ephraim today. We are descendants of Ephraim; we have been gathered out of the world as the children of Ephraim; and we hold the priesthood of God. We stand at the head of the twelve tribes of Israel. They are not all gathered yet; ten are still lost, and the Jews are just now beginning to gather in Palestine. I do not know whether many more of them will go there or not. More are leaving now than are going, and there are more Jews in New York City than there are in Jerusalem. But there will be a large body of Jews in Jerusalem at the time of the second coming of Christ.

You will remember that when he comes he will appear in several places, and one place will be Palestine. There will be the great battle of Armageddon at Palestine before the second coming of Christ, and Jerusalem will be besieged by the armies that will be gathered there. Then Almighty God will come to their rescue, and will pour down fire and brimstone upon those soldiers who are trying to destroy

the Jews and drive them into the sea. And then what? He will descend and stand upon the Mount of Olives, and the mount will cleave in twain. The besieged Jews will rush into the valley thus formed and will meet him there and will come to him and say, “What are these wounds in thy hands and in thy feet?” And he will say, “These are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends” (D&C 45:51,52).

Second, we have been given the job of receiving the restored gospel. It was declared in scripture that not only would there be a great falling away from the truth but that in the hour of God’s judgment the Church would be restored. That is one reason I call your attention to the fact that if any of you are looking for the true Church of Christ, you must look for a modern church. None of the old ones will do because none of them are modern. And the reason that the restored Church must be modern is that the angel who was to fly through the midst of heaven and restore the gospel to the earth was to come in the very hour of God’s judgment. So the true Church could not be anything but a modern church; none of the old-line churches would do.

After the angel brought back the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, other angels came with the holy priesthood, the apostleship, and the power to organize the Church again. Then came the commission from the Savior himself to “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15–16).

We have that commission. We are of Ephraim. We stand at the head of the work of God in these last days because Jacob blessed Ephraim many centuries ago that he should do this very thing. The Church is on the earth, and we are fulfilling the commission to take it into all the world. But we Latter-day Saints who are here at home must never allow ourselves to be casual about our religion—never. We must

realize that God expects enthusiasm from us, enthusiastic support of his program, a great determination to carry it forward, and determination to be missionaries, and a determination to live every principle of the gospel here at home. What did the Lord say? You shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. Are we doing that? We are under covenant to do so.

Every one of us is under covenant by virtue of our baptism, that we will be determined to do just that as we take upon ourselves the name of Christ. Every one of us declares to high heaven that we will serve him and keep his commandments. To bind that covenant, we eat of the broken bread in remembrance of the torn flesh of the Savior; we drink of the cup in remembrance of his saving blood. But to do so will not do us any good unless we keep the commandments. I repeat, the saving blood of Christ will not save us in our wickedness. The saving blood of Christ will only save us in our righteousness, in our state of repentance. That is why the Lord puts us under covenant, to remind us of this great fact, so that whenever we are tempted to sin we will remember the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We will remember our baptism, and that will remind us that we are under covenant with Almighty God to free ourselves from sin and to live righteously.

Do you see why the Lord said we should be in the world but not of the world? How do we know he expects enthusiasm from us? Did he not say that we were to love him with all our heart, might, mind, and soul? Is that not

enthusiasm? And when he talked about love of God, he talked in terms of service to God: "O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind, and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day" (D&C 4:2).

He expects us to put our priorities in order, too. What is to come first in our lives? Pleasure? Even work here at this university? You remember what the Savior said in the Sermon on the Mount. He was talking about shelter and food and raiment, what I call the bread-and-butter blessings, but he did not put them first. He said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

Do we have the faith and the courage to be Latter-day Saints first, last, and always, and to put the gospel of Jesus Christ first in our lives, knowing that if we do God will bless us and prosper us in all of our righteous activities? He gives many illustrations, but I mention only one. What did Malachi say would happen if we pay our tithes and offerings? The windows of heaven would be opened to such an extent that we could hardly receive the blessings (see Mal. 3:8–10). Do we believe Almighty God? Do we really accept Jesus as the Christ? He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments. . . . He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John 14:15, 21).

I pray earnestly that we will love him and serve him and honor him by our righteous lives, in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.