

the singing, Elder Gary J. Coleman of the Seventy will address us. He will then be followed by Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang
 "Now Let Us Rejoice."

Elder Gary J. Coleman

Gratitude for Heavenly Father's plan

Now let us rejoice that we are here in a worship setting with living prophets, who now walk the earth and see beyond the seen, hear heaven-inspired words above the din of the day, and know our God.

There is a divine plan. It is called the plan of our Heavenly Father.¹

We believe in God. We know that He lives and we can have faith in Him. The scriptures testify that we are the children of God, His literal spirit offspring.² We lived with Him before we came to this earth. We are created in His image, and He is our Heavenly Father. Therefore, we are all brothers and sisters.

Because our Heavenly Father loves us, He has prepared a plan for us as we live here in mortality. Before joining this Church, I remember my first experiences associated with this wonderful plan as I began to learn of the restored gospel. I became acquainted with latter-day scripture that teaches the importance of our premortal training in the spirit world and indicates that we received many lessons there to prepare us for our time here on earth.³ I have learned from the scriptures and the living prophets that this life is the time to prepare ourselves to meet God and one day enjoy eternal life with Him.⁴ The prophet Jacob exclaimed while referring to this eternal plan, "O how great the plan of our God!"⁵ I know that God lives and wants to help us return to live with Him.

The great plan of God provided a Savior for us. All accountable persons sin and must pass through the experience of

death at the end of our mortality. Therefore, God sent Jesus Christ to fulfill the plan by helping us overcome sin and death. Jesus is our Savior and Redeemer. Through His atoning sacrifice for each of us, He helps us overcome sin through repentance and baptism. Through His Resurrection, He makes it possible for everyone to overcome death and the grave. We have faith to follow Jesus and become more like Him. Oh, how we love our Friend, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only "name . . . under heaven . . . whereby [we] can be saved."⁶ I know that Jesus saves us from the effects of sin and death.

We thank God for revealing His plan and the mission of Jesus through His chosen witnesses, the prophets and apostles. God gives these witnesses authority to act for Him. Their testimonies of the truths of the gospel are written in sacred books called scriptures. When people hear and read these teachings of the prophets, they can know they are true by the power of the Holy Ghost.

"Are you still here?"

Nearly 28 years ago I desired to attend a general conference of the Church and drove 14 hours to be in Salt Lake City for the conference. I entered Temple Square at 8:00 A.M., where the line outside door number 10 was all the way across Temple Square and halfway down the south side of the Assembly Hall. I was nearly 300 feet from my goal. The usher called out that the Tabernacle was full. People dropped out of line, and I inched forward.

At five minutes before 10:00 I was the only person standing in front of my chosen door. The door opened, and the usher asked, "Are you still here?" He closed the door, and my heart sank. As the choir began to sing the opening hymn at 10:00 sharp, the door opened one more time, and the usher beckoned me inside. He placed me on half a seat and behind a post, but a welcome seat it was! I was able to sustain the Lord's chosen leaders and hear their counsel that special day, just as we have done here this afternoon.

God's pattern for revealing truth

In our day, or the latter days, God has continued His pattern for revealing truth. He chose a young man named Joseph Smith to learn about the eternal plan of salvation. Joseph was confused about the different religions in his community, but the scriptures led him to ask God what he should do.⁷ In answer to his prayer, God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him.⁸ Through this and other experiences, Joseph Smith was called as a prophet, like unto Moses and other biblical prophets.⁹ Because Joseph saw and talked with the Savior, his work was to restore the truth about the great plan of God and the divine mission of our Lord. I know that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God.

The Prophet Joseph received authority to teach the gospel and bring forth additional scripture. He was commanded to translate writings of ancient prophets from the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon prophets also knew about the plan of salvation and the sacred mission of Jesus Christ. The appearance of the resurrected Christ to the ancient people of the Americas is recorded in this sacred book.¹⁰ He taught them His gospel and established His Church among them. I know that the Book of Mormon is another testament of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

God has promised that the Holy Ghost will testify to each of us that sacred truths have been restored and that Joseph Smith was called by God to be a special witness of Christ and His gospel. We may come to know the truth of all things God has revealed, through the power of the Holy Ghost.¹¹

Conversion experiences

Millions of converts to this Church initially accepted the truths proclaimed by our missionaries in the first discussion. They then opened their hearts to all the discussions taught by the missionaries. They were invited to be baptized, confirmed, become "fellowcitizens with the saints,"¹² and continue on the gospel path to additional sacred covenants made in the temple.

A young couple with four children who were neighbors to a Latter-day Saint family accepted invitations to share activities and gospel-centered experiences. After the first missionary discussion, the father asked his LDS friend next door, "Would it be possible for you to baptize us on New Year's Eve? We would like to start the new year off right."

A young adult was seen near an institute of religion building, and he was asked if he had LDS friends. He responded, "Yes, and they are all on missions for the Mormon Church!" He was invited to be taught the gospel. He joined the Church. And one year later he was serving his own mission for the Lord.

A wonderful mother and wife in a beautiful nonmember family was asked if her spouse and children would be together for the eternities. Her answer was, "Yes, we will, won't we?" A few weeks later the mother, her husband, and the two oldest children were baptized because the answers to life's questions are found in this, the true Church of Jesus Christ.

A nonmember father whose son was serving a mission was asked, "Will you

be baptized on Father's Day?" He was baptized, with four former bishops of his family in attendance.

It is the power of the Spirit that convinces the investigator to pray about our message, to attend church, read the Book of Mormon, schedule further discussions, be baptized into the Lord's Church, and continue to be "nourished by the good word of God."¹³ We invite all people to come unto Christ through the door of faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. This is the door to eternal life. The Holy Ghost will help all of us stay on the path to God's presence.

The Lord opens doors to teach the gospel

Promptings from the Holy Ghost will also guide us to others who seek the true gospel. The Lord has said, "I will be with you; and in whatsoever place ye shall proclaim my name an effectual door shall be opened unto you, that they may receive my word."¹⁴

A few years ago I drove to Temple Square in Salt Lake City to meet an acquaintance of the missionaries. Their guest did not keep the appointment. My response to the missionaries was, "The Lord will provide someone for us to teach." In less than two to three minutes, two adult men walked through the front door of the North Visitors' Center and directly up to us. They spoke Spanish, and we did not! We assured them the best we could that someone would be able to help them. In moments, the only Spanish-speaking sister missionaries in the entire mission arrived at the visitors' center because they felt impressed to come there that morning!

Over a period of several weeks the missionary discussions were taught to those men, and they asked to be baptized. The Lord was true to His word. "An effectual door" was opened in the very moment it was needed for this beautiful experience.

We invite all who have been baptized and perhaps drifted away from the Lord to come back and renew your covenants with Him. With Jesus we say to all Israel, "Come home."¹⁵ Come home to the truths and ordinances of eternal life.

Testimony

Before becoming a member of this Church, I asked God, the Eternal Father, in fervent prayer about the truths of the Restoration. I know today, even as I knew that day, that hour, that moment 37 years ago, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that the principles and doctrines of the restoration of the gospel are true. God lives. Jesus is the Christ. Joseph Smith was the prophet of the restoration of the true gospel. The Book of Mormon is a record of holy prophets and another testament of the living Christ, who stands at the head of this Church. President Gordon B. Hinckley is the Lord's prophet for our day. He and 14 other Apostles are special witnesses of Christ in the only true Church on the earth. I pray that all of us will be able to answer the question "Are you still here?" and enter through the proper door to all the blessings of the gospel, now and forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *The Plan of Our Heavenly Father*, discussion 1 of *Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel* (1986).
2. See Acts 17:28-29.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 138:56.
4. See Alma 12:24.
5. 2 Nephi 9:13.
6. 2 Nephi 25:20.
7. See Joseph Smith—History 1:5-16.
8. See Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 28:2.
10. See 3 Nephi 11.
11. See Moroni 10:5.
12. Ephesians 2:19; see also verse 20.
13. Moroni 6:4.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 112:19.
15. "Now Let Us Rejoice," *Hymns*, no. 3.