

“The Rock: A Sure Foundation”

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President Bateman: What a pleasure it is for Marilyn and me to welcome you to the 2002 Women’s Conference sponsored by Brigham Young University and the Relief Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We are particularly pleased to welcome the new General Relief Society Presidency—Sisters Bonnie D. Parkin, Kathleen H. Hughes, and Anne C. Pingree. We have felt their spirit and know of their personal interest in and love for the sisters of the Church. Also, I would like to recognize and thank Sister Janet S. Scharman, who has served as chair of the conference for the past two years. Under her leadership, a marvelous spirit has enveloped the planning of the program, which we hope you will feel during the next two days.

The Rock of the Redeemer

Sister Bateman and I received the assignment to introduce the conference theme, which is taken from Helaman 5:12. The chapter begins with Helaman giving counsel to his sons, Nephi and Lehi. These young men had been named in honor of their early ancestors with the expectation that they would honor their names and emulate their good works. But as good as their ancestors were, Helaman knew that the works of men, even prophets, are not sufficient for salvation. Consequently, Helaman tells Nephi and Lehi that the only way they can be saved is through faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. They must look to the Savior of the world and base their lives on His teachings if they wish to attain eternal life.

In this regard, Helaman’s counsel in verse 12 (and the theme of our conference) reads: “And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation . . . whereon if men [and women] build they cannot fall” (Helaman 5:12).

Using imagery similar to Jesus’ imagery in the meridian of time, Helaman likens the quest for eternal life to building a house (Matthew 7:24–27). The foundation of the house must be built not only upon ground that is permanent, solid and steadfast but upon ground that is sacred—the rock of the Redeemer. During the Savior’s appearance to the Nephites following His resurrection, He explained the meaning of “the rock.” After inviting the multitude to feel the wounds in His hands and feet and to thrust their hand into His side, He taught the doctrine given him by the Father. The doctrine, Jesus said, is that the Father commands men and women everywhere to believe in Christ, repent, be baptized, and

receive the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 11:31–38).

And then the Savior states: “Verily, verily, I say unto you that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them” (3 Nephi 11:39).

Thus, to build one’s house on the “rock of the Redeemer” is to build one’s faith in the Father and the Son, to repent, to be baptized by immersion for the remission of sins, and to receive the Holy Ghost. In brief, it is to accept and live the gospel (D&C 11:24).

The Partnership

Moreover, the building process is a partnership. We do not build alone. Our Father in Heaven is the architect, the designer of the plan, and the Savior is the executor and mediator of the contract. He provides the tools and supervises the construction. Because each person has been given the gift of agency, each person must determine for himself whether or not he will enter into the covenant.

A clear statement by Christ indicating that he is a partner in constructing the building was given to the eleven apostles near the end of the Last Supper. He said: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

And then to the Missouri Saints in 1833 he said: “Let not your hearts be troubled; for in my Father’s house are many mansions, and I have prepared a place for you; and where my Father and I am, there ye shall be also” (D&C 98:18).

Do you notice the difference in the two statements? To the eleven apostles prior to Gethsemane and the cross, the Savior said that He would prepare a place. After the crucifixion and the resurrection, He told the Saints in Missouri that He had prepared a place for them. Through His atonement and resurrection, the Lord makes possible the construction of an eternal home for every person.

The prophets state that those who reject the master builder and His plan find His teachings “a stone of stumbling, . . . a rock of offence” (Isaiah 8:14; 1 Peter 2:8). From the beginning of time, most people who reject the gospel are not neutral. They take offense and fight against the Lord’s servants, and, therefore, against the Lord. They build their houses on sand and the storms of life cause them to fall because their lack of faith provides little sustenance in times of adversity (Matthew 7:26–27). In the meridian of time, Jewish leaders were expecting a savior who would free them from Roman oppression—someone who would establish an earthly kingdom. Instead, the Lord offered to free them from sin and give them thrones of their own in a celestial realm. The near-sighted Jewish leaders stumbled over the rock and took offense. The Sanhedrin, fearing the loss of their position of power, voted in council to take Jesus’ life (John 11:46–53). When Peter and the other apostles continued to preach after the Savior’s ascension, they were threatened again and again by the same Jewish leaders. Eventually, the apostles lost their lives or were banished to a far-off isle as

the Great Apostasy took hold.

The pattern of opposition to those engaged in the Lord's work continued in this dispensation. The Saints were persecuted in New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Nevertheless, the kingdom established in this day will "never be destroyed" as the "stone . . . cut out of the mountain without hands" will roll across the earth until the work is done (Daniel 2:44–45). The "stone [is] the only sure foundation, upon which [people] can build" (Jacob 4:15–16).

Sister Bateman: Sisters, it is wonderful to be with you. The planning committee has spent more than six months working on this conference. I wish to pay special tribute to two staff workers who are critical to the success of this event. They are Jolene Merica and Jean Hwang. I have come to appreciate these two sisters for their organizational skills and tireless energy. I love and appreciate them along with the other board members.

President Bateman has suggested that "building on the rock of the Redeemer" is not a solitary effort. If we put our trust in the Lord, we learn that the Master Builder provides assistance throughout the building process. First, we receive help in pouring the foundation and in laying the cornerstone.

In speaking to the new converts in Ephesus, Paul declared: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:19–20).

Just as apostles and prophets are the foundation of the Church, so the Lord's servants assist us in building our eternal homes. They are the oracles through whom God communicates His plan. In this spirit, the apostle Paul told the Saints in Corinth that he and they were "laborers together," that he was a master builder who had laid the foundation and they were to build upon it. He then warned them to be careful as they added to the building (1 Corinthians 3:9–10).

As the scriptures note, Jesus is the chief cornerstone of the building. In His day, "a large stone [was] placed in a corner of the building's foundation to secure it, to provide stability and strength to the structure . . . , and to serve as a guide for laying all other foundation stones." *I* Christ's atonement is the central act in history and the foundation stone in the gospel plan. His sacrifice and resurrection are also the keystone and capstone of the building. He is at the beginning of the process and at the end. When our eternal homes are completed, they will carry his name, just as the temple does. Through faith and baptism we take His name upon us and renew our covenants weekly through the sacrament (Mosiah 18:8–10). In time, we become His begotten sons and daughters (D&C 76:24).

Christ also assists in building the house by giving the gift of the Holy Ghost to the faithful. The Holy Spirit is a guide, a comforter, a revealer of truth, a witness, a cleanser, a sanctifier, and a sealer. As a guide and revealer, the Holy Ghost explains the Father's plan "line upon line and precept upon precept." He witnesses the truthfulness of the plan. As a comforter, he

provides inner peace and strength to endure the building process. In his role as cleanser, he keeps the house clean by encouraging us to be faithful, even in the little things. As a sanctifier, his purpose is to turn the house into a temple, to raise us from telestial to celestial people. Finally, as a sealer, he ensures the validity of the covenant by bonding the bricks together (2 Nephi 28:30; Ephesians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

The apostle Paul told the Corinthians: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:9–10).

As Paul suggests, there are surprises along the way. Although we think we know the plan, there are things not seen or heard and precepts which have not entered our hearts or minds as to the full measure of what God intends for us to be. You may have noticed from the scriptures cited earlier, we think we are building a house, but the Lord’s plan calls for a mansion. The command is to be perfect even as He is. To a finite mind, perfection appears unrealistic. At best it is a long way off. It is clear that we cannot do it on our own. Our view of our future selves is clouded by our present weaknesses. C. S. Lewis recognized that sometimes we fail to appreciate the incredible being that God intends to make of us.

Lewis said: “Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.” 2

It requires faith and trust in the Father and the Son to build a palace.

Developing Faith in the Master Builder

In addition to the rock being the gospel, the scriptures refer to Christ as the rock (2 Samuel 22:2–3, 32–33; Moses 7:53; Psalms 71:3, 78:35). He is the foundation stone upon which we build. As He said to the woman at the well so he says to us, “If you know who I am, you will ask me for living water” (John 4:10).

We are so fortunate as Latter-day Saints to know who He is. We know Him as the Jehovah of the Old Testament and Jesus of the New. We believe in Him not only as an historical figure, but as a resurrected person of form and substance today. We know that He is the Son of God and operates under the direction of His Father. We know the Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith in a grove of trees (Joseph Smith–History 1:17). We know Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon saw the Great Jehovah in the Kirtland Temple (D&C 110:1–4).

But to see Him is not the only way to know and build faith in Him. During the 1960s, President David O. McKay granted an interview to a prominent newsman. At the close of the interview, the newsman said he would like to ask a personal question for his own information. If the President did not want to answer it, he would understand. He then asked President McKay if [he] had seen the Savior.

“The President answered that he had not, but that he had heard his voice, many times, and he had felt his presence and his influence. . . .

“Then he told how some evidences [are] stronger than . . . sight, and recalled the occasion when the Savior appeared to his disciples and told Thomas who had doubted, ‘Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands: and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless but believing.’ And then President McKay said that he liked to believe Thomas did not actually look up, but knelt at the Savior’s feet and said unto him, ‘My Lord and my God.’ And then President McKay repeated the words of the Master, ‘Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.’”³

Joseph Smith stated that in order to develop faith in Christ one must have a “correct idea of his character, perfections, and attributes.”⁴ We know that He was a God before the earth was formed. We know that He is the creator of all things under the direction of the Father, that He is the source of life and light in all things (John 1:1–3; 4, 9; D&C 88:7–13). We understand that in the Garden and on the Cross, He experienced our pains and sufferings so that He could succor us in our weaknesses and trials, and even our death. We know that He is merciful as well as just. For example, when the ten lepers asked for mercy, nine were healed, but the tenth, because of his faith, was made whole. Christ is kind and gracious, but firm and unchangeable. He is patient and forgiving, but willing to cleanse the temple of those who would demean it. He is the epitome of humility and meekness, but He also is all powerful.

I believe that one of the most important truths to know about the Savior is His relationship with Heavenly Father: He is the “only begotten of the Father” in the flesh (John 1:14). The apostle Paul says that we as human beings are “partakers of flesh and blood,” meaning that we are mortals subject to death. In contrast, Paul indicates that Jesus “took part of the same” so that He could overcome death (Hebrews 2:14). By this Paul meant that Jesus was part mortal and part immortal. From His mother, Mary, He inherited mortality—the seeds of death. But from His immortal Father, He inherited an endless life, which gave Him the power to overcome death through the resurrection (John 5:26; Hebrews 7:16).

As He said to the Jews: “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:17–18).

I testify that Christ and the gospel plan are the foundation upon which we must build. I am so grateful for my testimony of Him. I am grateful for Helaman’s words, which point us as well as his sons to the atoning blood of Christ. May each of us learn the lesson taught by this

great prophet is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ.

President Bateman: In the great intercessory prayer just prior to His crucifixion, Jesus said that it is life eternal to know the Father and the Son (John 17:3). I believe that the best way to know Deity is to serve them. Through the light of Christ and the Holy Ghost, we have an inner voice, or conscience, that gives us innate feelings of right and wrong. The purpose of that light is to keep us in the right way, to light our path so that we do not stumble. That light invites us to do good and to believe in Christ (Moroni 7:15–16).

Elder Russell M. Nelson in the April 2002 general conference cited a scripture describing the foundational way in which women may serve the Lord:

“Sisters received special gifts [before the foundation of the world]. They, according to the Lord, were empowered “to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment, and to fulfil the promise which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world, . . . for their exaltation in the eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men; . . . herein is the work of my Father continued, that he may be glorified’ (D&C 132:63). Think of it: When a mother bears and cares for a child, she not only helps the earth answer the end of its creation (D&C 49:16–17), but she glorifies God!⁵”

Women are uniquely endowed with spiritual and physical gifts from before the foundation of the world that infuse within them elements of the divine nature. Whether a woman marries or not, whether a woman has children or not, those distinctive divine elements are part of her inheritance. If she uses them with her own children or the children of others, she will contribute to the purposes of this earth and assist God in His divine plan. Moreover, she will be blessed with an increase in faith and understanding. She will build her home upon the Rock, who is Christ.

In general, women have a greater degree of spiritual awareness and a sense of caring and love for others than do men. Often, there is a meekness and humility in women not found in men. If the history of war tells us anything, it is that women innately value life more than men. In contrast, the “natural man” is less patient, less submissive, and more apt to struggle with spiritual things. These special gifts enjoyed by women are not cultural but innate. The divine elements in women draw them closer to God as they nurture the spirits of God. These elements support women in building their lives on the Rock. For example, consider the following autobiographical story by Les Goates, a former writer for the Deseret News.

Les was born in a small community in this valley approximately one hundred years ago. He was born prematurely and weighed only three pounds when he was seven weeks old. In addition to his small size, the infant suffered from a serious physical deformity. The mother often wept and prayed over the tiny boy. Medicine in those days was primitive.

“There were no incubators, [so the baby] was kept in a small basket with medicated cotton for its bed. Folks came from miles around to see this tiny freak of nature—especially doctors, who shook their heads and went away. Of course, everyone knew the child would

not live very long.

“But the mother never ceased to fast and pray that her little one might be spared. She never relinquished for a moment the absolute assurance that she would yet rear her babe. Her faith was astounding. Then one day . . . her husband’s father . . . came down from his . . . house . . . to the little shack by the railroad track to offer . . . help . . . to the distraught mother and her child.

“The rugged old pioneer took one look at the infant in the basket, then said to the mother, ‘Louie, I want you to give up this baby and let it go. We all know that only your faith and prayers are keeping it alive. The time has come now for us to look . . . after you. Why, you haven’t been able to walk [but] a few steps at a time since the little thing was born. Now we must look out before we lose you, too.

“‘Besides, suppose that by your faith and . . . prayers, this babe is permitted to live. Chances are, it will be a lifetime burden to you and your family all the days of its life, for the doctors say it can never amount to anything. I think it best that we give it up, and let its spirit go back where it came from.’

“[The mother] said nothing as one more tear dropped upon the old, homemade rag carpet. Her father-in-law picked up his hat and strolled . . . up the street to the town meeting house where the monthly fast and testimony meeting was about to convene. In those days fast meetings were held on Thursday afternoons.

“Presently . . . the father of the infant came into the house. [He] too looked at the baby, heaved a long sigh that seemed to convey the attitude of discouragement and despair, and said to his wife, ‘I don’t think I can do any good here, Mother. I’ll go down to the Old Field and do some more plowing. The ground is getting dry and every day at plowing helps the crops that much.’

“He hitched his team to the wagon and drove over the railroad track and down the road to his little farm. The rattle of the wheels as they bounced over the rails had scarcely died away when the mother said to her sister-in-law, ‘Sarah, we are going over to the fast meeting and get the baby a name and a blessing.’

“‘But how can we go to the meeting?’ Sarah protested. ‘We have no horse or buggy, and you have scarcely walked since the baby came.’

“‘We’ll manage somehow,’ the mother remonstrated. ‘I’ll take this small rocking chair, drag it along for a few steps, then sit down and rest. You can carry the baby. He is very light.’

“So, in that strange way, these two women made their arduous way to the . . . meeting house on a Thursday afternoon carrying a wee babe and a rocking chair.

“When they arrived the babies were already being blessed. The wee infant was given a name

and a blessing under the hands of its maternal grandfather. . . .

“After this ordinance had been attended to, the time was given to testimony bearing and among others there arose to speak a woman of rare spirituality. . . . She spoke of the many gifts and blessing she had received through the gospel. . . .

“She then began to speak in a strange language, a smooth, melodic tongue that sounded like sweet music. As she spoke, she occasionally made a gesture toward this mother with the small baby, so that the audience understood that she was speaking about them.

“When she . . . finished, . . . the stake patriarch arose to interpret the testimony. ‘This sister has spoken in the language of Adam,’ he said, ‘and she has conveyed a message and a promise to this mother who has fasted and prayed so long for her little one.’ It was on account of the exceedingly great faith of this mother, he said, that her prayers had ascended to the high heaven and her child, who had been appointed to come into the world only long enough to receive an earthly body, would now be privileged to live, to grow to manhood and rear a family in Zion. He would perform a work of which this mother would be exceedingly well pleased, the patriarch concluded.

“How much easier and shorter were the steps back home to the little old shack by the railroad track! When they arrived there, assisted by kind neighbors and friends, Sarah undid the baby’s wraps to make it comfortable and as she did so she exclaimed excitedly, ‘Louie, Louie, come here quick! The baby! He’s perfectly all right!’

“The mother ran quickly to her baby and found that all signs of physical deformity had disappeared; the child, in very truth, was perfectly normal.”⁶

Brother Goates grew to manhood and married; he and his wife had five children. He became one of the finest sportswriters in America, served as a bishop, and was a special writer for the Public Communications Department of the Church.

The point of the story is not the miracle but the relationship between the mother and child and the mother’s with the Lord. Her love for the newborn infant fostered by those special nurturing gifts caused her to plead with Heavenly Father to bless the child. In the process, the trial of her faith strengthened the bond between her and the Master.

But suppose the Lord had answered her prayer in a different way. Would her house on the Rock have been any less complete? Would it have meant that her faith was insufficient? I believe that she would have loved the Lord just as much and her house would have remained on solid ground.

All of us are aware of prayers that have not been answered in the way we would like them to be. I have had times when I pled with the Lord for a certain blessing, and my hopes were not realized. On other occasions, my dreams were fulfilled. Faith is not the only factor in determining the location of the rooms and the design of the house. We need to remember that our Father in Heaven is the architect, and He and the Son know more about us than we

do. They can see the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). How wonderful it is to be in a covenant relationship with them.

In closing, we testify of the Lord's goodness, of His love and concern for each of you. He knows you. He knows your individual circumstances and will listen to your petitions and answer them. Helaman understood that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Only by building our house on sacred ground—on the rock of the Redeemer—will we find peace, happiness, and a fulness of joy. May Helaman's words be written in our minds and hearts as our prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes:

1. D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *New Testament Apostles Testify of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 40.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 176.
3. *I Know That My Redeemer Lives: Latter-day Prophets Testify of the Savior* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 138.
4. Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, comp. N. B. Lundwall (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 38.
5. Russell M. Nelson, "How Firm Our Foundation," *Ensign*, May 2002, 75–76.
6. Harold B. Lee, *Remembering the Miracles*, comp. L. Brent Goates (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2001), 147–49.
- 6 . Ogden and Skinner, *New Testament Apostles Testify of Christ*, 40.
- 6 . Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 176.
- 6 . *I Know That My Redeemer Lives, Latter-day Prophets Testify of the Savior*, Deseret Book, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1990, 138.
6. Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, comp. N. B. Lundwall (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 38.
- 6 . Russell M. Nelson, "How Firm Our Foundation," *Ensign*, May 2002, 75–76.
6. Harold B. Lee, *Remembering the Miracles*, comp. L. Brent Goates (American Fork, Ut.: Covenant Communications, 2001), 147-49.

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