

Groundbreaking Address

by President David O. McKay



Address delivered by President David O. McKay at groundbreaking ceremonies of the Oakland Temple, held in the Interstake Center, Oakland, California, on Saturday, May 26, 1962, at 10:00 a.m. Following this meeting, the groundbreaking was held. The dedicatory prayer was offered by President McKay at the close of the meeting.

*M*y beloved brothers and sisters, I esteem it not only a great privilege, but an honor to be a participant in these sacred exercises. My heart is filled with the spirit of commendation for manifest evidences of care and preparation made by President Stone and his associates anticipating the ceremonies attending the breaking of the ground for the Oakland Temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On behalf of the First Presidency, members of the Twelve and their wives, and others accompanying us, we thank you, President Stone, for the cordial welcome and evidences of careful and wise preparation, appropriate for this sacred service.

I have been carried back in memory to another sacred service held 64 years ago in the mission field when the elders of the Scottish conference assembled in a room at the headquarters of the Scottish conference—as it was called then—presided over by James L. McMurrin, representing the presidency of the European Mission. In the midst of that service, a man, not a member of the conference, but visiting from Ireland, arose and said, “Brethren, there are angels in this room.”

It was no surprise to those who had partaken of the spirit of that session, and it was no surprise when Brother McMurrin arose and said, “Yes brethren, there are angels in this room.” There is evidence in this gathering today, in the inspirational remarks of the brethren, and the singing that we are not alone in this gathering; that there are others who have long waited, longer than you or I, for this sacred moment.

I am reminded that it was in 1934 when a committee was appointed to choose the site of the Oakland Temple. I wish to

commend those men. The chairman of that committee was Elder Eugene Hilton, who offered the invocation; Delbert F. Wright, who is not here, but presides over the Minnesota Stake; and Brother A. B. Graham, a real estate man, who has gone to his reward. Those three men looked around this area for a suitable temple site, and they finally chose one which was most suitable, but it was not for sale. It was this site.

Site Chosen

The war came on, but the labors of these men continued. One day, Brother Graham received word that the site they had chosen seven years before was for sale. The owner had been unable to consummate a deal which he had anticipated, and now had the 15 acres for sale. Brother Hilton said, "This is most important. It is an answer to our prayers. We shall not wait for the mails. I shall go to Salt Lake tonight."

I commend the faith, the energy and wisdom of the members of this committee who chose the site which today we are dedicating, and on which we shall break the first ground.

It was two months later when President Heber J. Grant sent a member of the Twelve to look at the site, and he reported to President Grant and the Brethren that it was ideal. From that time on, this site has been called "Temple Hill."

On November 16, 1942, a letter signed by President Heber J. Grant and President David O. McKay, counselor, was sent to Brother A. B. Graham stating, "We have concluded to purchase the 15 acres suggested in President Hilton's letter of September 15, 1942, and inspected by yourself, President McKay, President Hilton and others, on Tuesday, November 3, 1934," etc. With that letter was enclosed a check for \$100.00 for assurance of good faith, and later (January 28, 1943) the balance was sent down, and this site was purchased for the "staggering" amount of a little over \$18,000.00

Around the Horn

My mind went back further than that, to the men mentioned by the governor in his letter when the sailing vessel, “SS Brooklyn,” sailed around Cape Horn with members of the Church who left New York about the same time that the Saints left Nauvoo to come across the plains. Samuel Brannan was captain of that vessel. I wish Sister McKay were here today. Her grandparents were members of that company that sailed around Cape Horn. Two children were buried in the Pacific; two were buried in the Atlantic; and two were born on the Pacific. One of those children born on the Pacific was Sister McKay’s aunt. The captain said the child must be named “Pacific.” The grandmother, however, added Anna. So Anna Pacific Robbins, born before the vessel touched these shores, became the aunt of Sister McKay. They landed on the shores of a Spanish village known as Yerba Vista, which afterwards became San Francisco.

Sister McKay was with me when we chose the site, and last evening she asked me to give her love and greetings to you. She wished that she could be here, and I wish she could so that she could partake of the spiritual feast this morning, for it is a spiritual feast, and those who have contributed throughout the years, some of whom have now gone to the Other Side, are participating spiritually in this great event.

Much of what I am going to say has already been expressed, but before offering the dedicatory prayer for this area and attending to the groundbreaking ceremonies, I wish to add, by way of emphasis, if I can to what these brethren have already testified.

All members of the Church know temples are built for the performance of sacred ordinances—not secret, but sacred. A temple is erected for special purposes, and when dedicated only members of the Church in good standing may enter.

One of the distinguishing features of the Restored Church of Jesus Christ is the eternal nature of covenants and ceremonies. For example, generally in civil as well as in Church ceremonies, couples are married “for time,” or “until death dost thou part.” But, as has been said today, love is just as eternal as the spirit, and if the spirit continues after death, so will love.

This interests nearly every intelligent inquirer and investigator, especially when he or she realizes the truth, that love is the divinest attribute of the human soul. Therefore, whenever a person dies, love will persist. There is no one who can deny that. And if any inquirer believes in the immortality of the soul, or in the persistence of the spirit and personality after death, he must admit that love will also persist.

Logically, there follows another question: Whom shall we love in the next world? Talking upon this point, when Brother Hugh J. Cannon and I made a world tour, an American woman who had just visited Australia said, "Why, we should love everybody." That is true; we should love everybody here and now. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" is a divine command. But I think, as Brother Brown has already said of his wife and loved ones, I shall have a feeling for my wife, my sons and daughters which will be more sacred, more highly treasured in eternity than my feelings for others whom perhaps I had never met. And so we should like to have that union between loved ones perpetuated for time and all eternity.

The place to do that is in the House of God. Things of this earth are typical of heavenly things, and I think we shall meet that condition sometime in our conscious knowledge of what we knew before we came here fully incorporated with what we have gained here, and love will be expressed and manifest by the ties which are eternal. Experiences we have in life bind the heart. Death cannot separate hearts that are thus bound together, for each of you husbands will recognize your wife in the other world, and you will love her there as you love her here.

Love Will Continue

Why should death separate you when love will continue after death? It should not; it need not, for when Jesus was here upon the earth, He told His apostles: "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

And with the restoration to earth of the Holy Priesthood, the Church asserts that this power was again given to chosen men, and that in the house of the Lord where the marriage ceremony is performed by those who are properly authorized to represent our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the union between husband and wife, and between parents and children, is effected for time and all eternity, and that for those thus married the family will continue into eternities.

That is a great message from a just God, a kind Father, who loves His children just as you love yours, and more so, of course. That is one purpose of this temple. It is a glorious one, and young people should realize that it requires righteous living before the marriage vows—purity, chastity, loyalty to your future husband or your future wife.

But there is another purpose—not so easily understood by inquirers until they get a glimpse of the justice of God or until we ask them: “Do you think that a just God would require me to conform to certain principles and ordinances in order for me to enter into the Kingdom of God, and that He would permit you to enter the Kingdom of God without complying with those principles and ordinances?” We ask the world that.

Those who accept Jesus Christ, our Lord, as the Author of salvation; those who accept His unqualified statements regarding the necessity of obedience to certain principles, are bound to admit that everybody must comply with certain fundamental ordinances or else nobody need comply with them. That is a plain fact.

One Eternal Plan

We have, as you know, in holy writ, ample evidence that the Savior referred to one Eternal Plan. For instance, when Nicodemus—a member of the Sanhedrin, a man who had evidently listened to the Savior speak and who had probably followed him—called on Jesus, the scriptures say by night. (People think he came by night so he would not be detected—I think, to be more charitable, he came because there was an opportunity for him to have a private conference), to whom he said, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (see John 3:2).

I wish we had the account of just what took place in that conversation, but it was on the immortality of the soul. Jesus said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” And “Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old?” Jesus spoke plainly, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3-5). Now that is an eternal law. All Christians believe, or should believe, in the words that Jesus answered.

The words of the Savior to Nicodemus are accepted in their literal sense by faithful members of the Church. The scriptures make no distinction between the living and the dead. This law is of universal application, exemption being granted only to children who die in infancy, having no sin to expiate. To provide a means of salvation for all, facilities are made available in the temples whereby the living may be baptized in behalf of the deceased.

Evidence that such vicarious work was performed in the early Christian Church is found in the words of Paul to the Corinthians: “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?” (1 Cor. 15:29). The pseudo-Christian world has stumbled over the meaning of this simple text, and not a few commentators have tried to explain away its true applicability to all mankind of the Savior’s teachings.

Baptism Essential for All

To repeat, if baptism is essential for one man, it is essential for all. Then the question may be asked, as was asked by a Chinese student, a graduate of one of our leading colleges in America, who in conversation with a Protestant minister, said, “What about my ancestors who never heard of the name of Jesus Christ?”

“Oh,” was the reply, “they are all lost.”

The Chinese student’s sense of justice was offended, for he immediately said, “I’ll have nothing to do with a religion so unjust!” Had that Chinese professor, or doctor, asked a “Mormon” that question, the latter would have answered, “They will have an opportunity to hear the Gospel, and to be baptized, to be born of

the water and of the spirit, that they might enter into the Kingdom of God.”

Where did Christ’s spirit go while His body lay in the tomb? The Apostle Peter tells us that He went to preach to the spirits who were in prison, who were once disobedient in the days of Noah when the ark was being prepared (1 Peter 3:19–20). Those who had died thousands of years ago were still living in the spirit world, and the Gospel was taken to them as it will be taken to all of our Father’s children.

This, then, is another purpose of temples. You may have the opportunity of gathering the names of your ancestors, who, being baptized by proxy, may become members of the Kingdom of God in the other world as we are here. Since the restoration of this principle and practice, Church members have zealously searched the records of the world for the history of their ancestors that their forefathers might receive vicariously the blessings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In connection with this work the Church maintains an extensive genealogical organization.

Two Great Purposes

These two great purposes—eternal marriage (binding the family for time and eternity), and opening the door of the Kingdom for those who have died without an adequate opportunity to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its essential ordinances—when preached properly, earnestly, and sincerely to the honest-in-heart, will appeal to the justice of those who love the truth.

In addition there is the temple “endowment,” which is also an ordinance pertaining to man’s eternal journey and limitless possibilities and progress which a just and loving Father has provided for the children whom He made in His own image—for the whole family. “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

God help us to appreciate the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ in its all-embracing justice and mercy and glorious eternal plan. The whole purpose and meaning of life is contained in it, with its great saving and ennobling ordinances that will take the individual to his

highest possibilities here and hereafter with an everlasting association with his loved ones in the presence of God.

I pray with all my soul that all the members of the Church, their children, and their children's children—and all men everywhere—may at least glimpse the glory of the House of the Lord, and have wisdom to understand and the strength to apply the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which are eternal and applicable to every person living in developing that spirituality which will bring peace on earth and goodwill toward men.

These are a few thoughts thrown out for you to contemplate prayerfully and sincerely, and may your hearts be filled with testimony of their divined truth, for I testify to you that they are God's true principles, and that He is at the head; He is a loving Father. Jesus Christ is the head of this Church, the only church on earth furnishing salvation to all of God's children by obedience to the principles and laws of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

God bless you that the spirit of this gathering may rest with you today and always, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

("Pres. McKay Dedicates Plot for Erection of New Oakland Temple," *Church News*, June 2, 1962, 15, 18)