

Salem Utah Stake Vision: Establish Zion

August 2011

We are under covenant to establish Zion – to prepare the earth for the Lord’s second coming; not simply to talk about it or read about it, but to “establish” it. To establish Zion will require us to live the principles of the celestial kingdom here on earth. (*D&C 105:5*) It will require us to love God above all things and to place Him first in our lives and not be distracted by the world. It will require greater devotion, greater obedience, and greater service to each other. It will require greater attention to our relationship with the Holy Ghost and the spirit of revelation. It will require full commitment to our families and to making our homes a refuge from the storm. It will require that we reach out to strengthen and lift one another. This will not be easy, the adversary will employ all he has to distract and tempt us. To become a Zion people we must become of “one heart and one mind,” “dwell in righteousness,” have “no poor” among us (*Moses 7:18*), and become “pure in heart”. (*D&C 97:21*)

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “We ought to have the building up of Zion as our greatest object” (*Teachings: Joseph Smith, 186*). “The building up of Zion is a cause that has interested the people of God in every age; it is a theme upon which prophets, priests and kings have dwelt with peculiar delight; they have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we live; and fired with heavenly and joyful anticipations they have sung and written and prophesied of this our day; but they died without the sight; we are the favored people that God has made choice of to bring about the Latter-day glory” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith [Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 2007], 186*).

As we work to establish Zion together, there are three central areas of focus that will guide our efforts:

- 1. Receive Revelation**
- 2. Establish Homes of Zion**
- 3. Love One Another**

Receive Revelation

We must do everything in our power to qualify for the Holy Ghost and remove anything that offends and denies the power of God in our lives - for without His guidance we will be deceived (*D&C 45:57*). As we live worthy of and act upon the whisperings of the spirit we grow in faith and qualify more fully to receive the Holy Ghost as our constant companion. (*D&C 121:34-46*) We qualify for the spirit of the Holy Ghost as we “feast upon the words of Christ” with the promise that we will be taught “line upon line” and “shown all things that we should do”. (*2 Nephi 32*)

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has said, “I sometimes think that one of the best-kept secrets of the kingdom is that the scriptures open the door to the receipt of revelation.” Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught, “We do not overstate the point when we say that the scriptures can be a Urim and Thummin to assist each of us to receive personal

revelation. Because we believe that scripture reading can help us receive revelation, we are encouraged to read the scriptures again and again. By this means, we obtain access to what our Heavenly Father would have us know and do in our personal lives today. “ (*Ensign - Jan 1995 – Scripture Reading and Revelation*)

There is tremendous power and promises associated with reading the Book of Mormon. President Ezra Taft Benson has said, “It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that, too. But there is something more. There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called “the words of life” (*D&C 84:85*), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance.” (*President Ezra T. Benson – Oct 1986 General Conference – The Book of Mormon – The Keystone of our Religion*)

We invite every individual, adult to child, to read the Book of Mormon with greater emphasis to invite the Holy Ghost more fully into our lives. As we “feast upon the words of Christ” through this sacred book that has been written specifically for us in these the “last days” we will qualify for a special endowment of the spirit of revelation so needed in our daily lives. We ask every member and family to set your own goals, to establish your own schedule to read the Book of Mormon with greater emphasis from now to the end of the year.

We testify that the blessings promised by the Prophets concerning our children and our homes will be yours as you follow this counsel. “Without reservation I promise you that if each of you will observe this simple program, regardless of how many times you previously have read the Book of Mormon, there will come into your lives and into your homes an added measure of the Spirit of the Lord, a strengthened resolution to walk in obedience to His commandments, and a stronger testimony of the living reality of the Son of God”. (*President Gordon B. Hinckley – Ensign, Aug. 2005*)

Establish Homes of Zion

It is in the home that we forge shields of faith for our children. Our homes must first be a “defense and a refuge” before the stake can fully be a “defense and a refuge”. Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “Zion is Zion because of the character, attributes, and faithfulness of her citizens... If we would establish Zion in our homes, branches, wards, and stakes it will be necessary to (1) become unified in one heart and one mind; (2) to become individually and collectively a holy people; and (3) to care for the poor and the needy with such effectiveness that we eliminate poverty among us. **We cannot wait until Zion comes for these things to happen – Zion will come only as they happen**”. (*Elder D. Todd Christofferson - Come to Zion – November 2008 – General Conference*)

We have felt strongly that one way we must fortify and strengthen our homes, marriages and children against the storms of the last days is to attend the temple. To build our homes upon the principles of Zion, we must go to the “House of God” so that we might come home to build our own houses of God. In the temple, we are “endowed from on high” with knowledge of God’s eternal plan, the central role of families, and how essential it is to follow the word of God through His servants to lead our families safely home. ***We invite every member to prayerfully consider how to bring the temple more fully into our lives and our families.***

Establish a plan to organize your time and schedules to attend more frequently and bring the blessings of the temple into your homes.

“And inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it; Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God.” (*Doctrine and Covenants 97:15:15-16*)

We invite every family to read Doctrine and Covenants 88:119-126. As you read these verses, ask in your mind, “What are the things Thou would have me do now in my life and my family?” As you read, with this prayer in your hearts, write down the impressions that will come to your mind, counsel together with your family, and ask additional questions about the impressions you received. Set a time and plan to accomplish what the Lord instructs you to do. By doing this, we earn His trust and we demonstrate our desires to seek Him and to learn how to qualify for additional revelation in our lives.

Elder Richard G. Scott has taught us, “I believe that you can leave the most precious, personal direction of the Spirit unheard because you do not respond to, record, and apply the first promptings that come to you. Have patience as you are perfecting your ability to be led by the Spirit. By careful practice, through the application of correct principles, and by being sensitive to the feelings that come, you will gain spiritual guidance. I bear witness that the Lord, through the Holy Ghost, can speak to your mind and heart.” (*Elder Richard G. Scott – To Acquire Spiritual Guidance – Oct 2009 General Conference*)

Love One Another

One of the central doctrines and principles of Zion is love - to first love God with all our hearts and to love each other (our neighbors) as ourselves. So important are these central doctrines, the Savior said, “There is none other commandment greater than these” (*Mark 12:31*)

As we place God first in all things, greater love and devotion is established between husband and wife, parents and children. The power of God’s love transforms us, enriches our lives, brings happiness and peace, and ultimately perfects us - “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. God is Love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” (*1 John 4:12 & 16*)

We can never comprehend in our mortal minds how deeply our Father in Heaven loves us as His children. His love and the love of His Son through the Atonement, is the greatest expression of love the world has ever known. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to **love one another**.” (*1 John 4:7:10 -11*)

The word “*one*” is a very significant yet often overlooked word that has many meanings. It is a central theme of Zion - “*one* heart and *one* mind”, in loving - “love *one* another”, in unity - “if ye are not *one*, ye are not mine”, and especially in the greatest gift given to all of mankind – the Atonement [at-*one*-ment] of Jesus Christ.

Elder James E. Faust testified, “Our Redeemer took upon Himself all the sins, pains, infirmities, and sicknesses of all who have ever lived and will ever live. No one has ever suffered in any degree what He did. He knows our mortal trials by firsthand experience. We long for the ultimate blessing of the Atonement—to

become one with Him, to be in His divine presence, to be called individually by name as He warmly welcomes us home with a radiant smile, beckoning us with open arms to be enfolded in His boundless love. The overwhelming message of the Atonement is the perfect love the Savior has for each and all of us. It is a love which is full of mercy, patience, grace, equity, long-suffering, and, above all, forgiving.” (Elder James E. Faust – “*The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope*” – Oct 2001 General Conference)

The Atonement frees us from anything anyone can do to offend us or hurt us. As we fully receive the Atonement into our personal lives, we receive the love of God in our hearts – to forgive, to remember no more, to not compare or judge, and to recognize we are all in this together – that no one is better than another and we are all equal in the sight of God.

Elder M. Russell Ballard has said, “Brothers and sisters, I believe that **if we could truly understand the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, we would realize how precious is one son or daughter of God.** I believe our Heavenly Father’s everlasting purpose for His children is generally achieved by the small and simple things we do for one another. At the heart of the English word atonement is the word one. If all mankind understood this, there would never be anyone with whom we would not be concerned, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, or social or economic standing. We would strive to emulate the Savior and would never be unkind, indifferent, disrespectful, or insensitive to others. If we truly understood the Atonement and the eternal value of each soul, we would seek out the wayward boy and girl and every other wayward child of God. We would help them to know of the love Christ has for them. We would do all that we can to help prepare them to receive the saving ordinances of the gospel.” (*The Atonement and the Value of One Soul* – April 2004 General Conference).

We invite every member of the stake to reach out more – to open our hearts and our homes to invite others into our lives. To share ourselves with our neighbors, our ward family, and anyone the Lord brings into our paths. We invite each of you to love one another more fully – to take time to listen and build relationships, to visit the sick and weary, to forgive an offense, to reconcile a relationship, to receive impressions each week concerning “whom the Lord would have us love”. It is through the Atonement we are privileged to participate with God – “As I have loved you, love one another”.

We testify that these impressions are from our Father in Heaven. These are the first things we are to do now to establish Zion more fully in our homes, wards, and stake. As we diligently seek to be obedient to the instructions we receive, we qualify for further instructions from our Father in Heaven to lead us and prepare us. We are humbled to have felt His love for every family, every son and daughter in this stake. We share these feelings with you with our love and our prayers that together we might all become of one heart and one mind, that we will dwell in righteousness together, and that there will be no poor (emotionally, spiritually, temporally) among us – that indeed we may all become more pure in our hearts to receive all that the Father has for us. We love you.

The Salem Utah Stake Presidency