

You — The Leaders in 1988

M. RUSSELL BALLARD, JR.

Good morning. It is a privilege for Sister Ballard and me to be here. I would trust that the Lord will enlighten my mind and bless me and bless you also that we might have a learning experience together here this morning. As I contemplated this assignment, the thought has run through my mind that unless, somehow, we all leave this building more determined than when we came in that we are going to become better prepared, I shall not have done what Heavenly Father would have me do.

I would like to talk to you this morning, my fellow students, about what I think is the most exciting and thrilling thing to contemplate in your lives. I would like to talk to you about the Church as I believe it will be ten years from now. I would like you to go with me and, projecting your vision from sitting here in this beautiful center in 1978, take a look at what the Church will be in 1988. Please bear this thought in mind: What the Church will be in 1988 will largely depend on how you are prepared to assume your rightful role in this glorious gospel of Jesus Christ as it has been restored to the earth.

It took the Church ninety-eight years, from 1830 to 1928, to organize its first one hundred stakes. During the next twenty-four years the Church worked very hard to organize the

second one hundred stakes. Then we start to see a very interesting picture unfold. At the end of the next eight years, by 1960, the three hundredth stake of the Church was organized. I am proud to tell you that it was organized in Toronto, Canada, where Elder Thomas S. Monson was presiding at the time as president of the mission and, of course, where Sister Ballard and I were privileged to preside just recently. Then, after the next four years, we had organized the next one hundred stakes, bringing the Church to a stake population of four hundred by 1964. It took us six years after that to create the next one hundred stakes, bringing the population of the Church to five hundred by 1970. It took three years to create another one hundred stakes, bringing the population to six hundred by 1973; two years for another one hundred stakes for a population of 700 stakes by 1975; and an additional 18 months for the next 100 stakes of the Church, created during

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1977. The nine hundredth stake of the Church was organized March 19, 1978.

I had the great privilege last weekend of being in Atlanta, Georgia, with one of the truly great priesthood leaders of all time as far as I am concerned, Elder LeGrand Richards. You missionaries who are here, how would you like to have as your senior companion LeGrand Richards? That was my experience this last weekend. We were assigned by President Benson and the First Presidency to go to his old mission field, where he presided forty-three years ago, and organize the Atlanta Georgia Stake. Elder Richards is the chairman of the committee that approves the creation of wards and stakes, and he told me on that trip that this year so far that committee had approved the creation of fifty-three new stakes. I think that I can say to you this morning without much fear of contradiction that in 1978 the chance of our organizing another one hundred stakes is very good. This means that in one year—1978—we will do what it took our first ninety-eight years to do.

Explore with me for a minute or two how this relates to you here this morning. Suppose that the Church creates one hundred stakes a year. (Now I do not believe that will really be the case; I think it will accelerate at a faster rate than that, as indicated in the figures I have already given to you.) But for the sake of my example, I shall estimate that in 1988 we will be a church of approximately 2,500 stakes: I would like you to think in terms of this. Where are the 2,500 stake presidents of 1988? Where are their first counselors, second counselors, executive secretaries, clerks? Where are the 2,500 times twelve, or 30,000, high councilors? And suppose that every stake has an average of ten units—about the average in the stakes today—where are the 25,000 bishops, first counselors, second counselors, executive secretaries, clerks, elders quorum presidents and their counselors, seventies presidents, high priest group leaders and their counselors,

Relief Society presidents and counselors, Primary presidents with their counselors, and on and on? Where are they? I would like to suggest to you this morning that you are they, you sitting here in this Marriott Center this morning. And now, the next question that I think should be posed to you is this: Are you ready? Are you ready to assume the role that the Lord, I am sure, has in mind for you in 1988?

Many of you sitting here, as I look at you, seem to be between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five. I had an interesting experience recently as the area supervisor in the United States Atlantic South area. I have there forty-six stakes of the Church in fourteen regions and nine missions. Recently, one of the Quorum of the Twelve went to one of my stakes to reorganize the stake presidency. When he came back he said, “Russ, you have a great stake president.”

“Tell me about him,” I said.

“He’s a bright young man. He speaks Spanish as fluently as he speaks English.” (This is in an area that has a lot of Spanish-speaking people.) Then he said, “He’s twenty-eight years old.”

Do you brethren sitting here realize how many of our stake presidents are in their early thirties? Do you have any idea how many bishops now presiding in the Church are in their twenties? Far more, perhaps, than you have ever dreamed possible. I would like to suggest to you that we think in terms of this.

I believe that your birthright and my birthright has been a very special thing as it relates to Heavenly Father and his eternal plan. I do not think for one minute that you on this campus or you who are preparing to go out into the mission field and are now in the Language Training Mission are here by accident. I do not think that Heavenly Father sits in his heaven and flips a coin and says to his spirit children, “You go here and you go to the depths of Africa,” or “You go to the depths of China or India or any other country that

doesn't enjoy the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ." I think your birthright, the privilege and right you have of being a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is a very sacred privilege. And I do not think that it came by accident. I believe that you made some very important commitments and promises to Heavenly Father before you were ever born.

As for those of you who were born in the covenant, whose parents were sealed in the temple before your birth, there is no question in my mind that you made some very special promises and commitments to Heavenly Father before you came into the home where you were reared. Thus, I believe that we each ought to have an in-depth, soul-searching evaluation of our lives this morning. Are we living up, in every way, to the promises and the blessings that Heavenly Father has in store for us? Is there anything in our lives, young people, that could be better? Is there any transgression dragging behind us that needs to be cleared up? Are we preparing in every way to fulfill the callings that Heavenly Father has in store for us?

Let me share with you a personal experience that may be of some interest to you. You know that as General Authorities we are called and assigned by the President of the Quorum of the Twelve to go to stake conferences. If you have been following what has been happening in the Church you know that the First Quorum of Seventy has now been extended the privilege of organizing stakes. I had been with members of the Twelve and experienced reorganizations as I did last weekend with Elder Richards, but just three weeks ago I was sent alone to reorganize a stake presidency—just me and the Lord and a Regional Representative. That is an awesome experience. It is an awesome assignment to find yourself sitting across the desk interviewing all the priesthood leaders in the stake, recognizing that ultimately the man that the Lord has in

mind has to be called. Put yourself into my shoes for a moment and you can sense my great concern. I fasted, I prayed, I sought the guidance of the Lord—and then a very interesting thing happened to me. As we were interviewing all of these priesthood leaders, a man came in, about the fifth from the last to be interviewed, and as he walked through the door I stood up, shook his hand, and said "I know you. Where do I know you from?" He was as familiar to me, my dear friends, as anybody that I have ever known.

And he said, "Brother Ballard, I've only met you once, and that was only for two or three minutes eleven months ago at a regional young adult conference where you spoke." But as he walked through the door, I want to testify to you that the Lord made it manifest to me that he was to be the stake president.

Now an interesting thing unfolded. After he had been called and sustained in the Sunday morning session we called on him to bear his testimony and this is what he said to the Saints: His father was a patriarch in the neighboring stake, and his mother was president of the stake Relief Society in the neighboring stake. He called his mother and father to talk to them—I had given him permission to do that—and he said, "Hello mother."

She said, "Son, you don't need to tell me. You've been called to be the stake president."

"How did you know?" he asked.

"At 12:30," she said, "I was in the kitchen, and it simply became known to me by the power of the Spirit that my son had just been called to be a stake president. Your father had gone to the store, and when he came home he walked into the kitchen and said, 'You know, mama, I have a strong feeling that our son has been called to be a stake president.'"

He was a patriarch, and she was a Relief Society president. They had no communication with their son until he called on the phone. That was a great reassurance to me that the

Lord's will had been manifested and that the impressions I received were correct.

This morning I would just like to have you understand this: How do the names of bishops and stake presidents and General Authorities surface in the minds of those who have the responsibility of extending the call? How does a stake president know who the bishop should be? How does a General Authority know who the stake president should be? How does the President of the Church know who a General Authority should be? I shall tell you how I think it is.

I believe in revelation—and so do you—and I believe that the Lord is getting acquainted with you right now. You missionaries that are preparing to go on your missions, do not let one day go by on your mission when you do not demonstrate to the Lord that you are reliable, that you are trustworthy, that you are dedicated, that you are committed, that you are on his side, for he is getting acquainted with the young men and the young women of this Church today. Here at BYU and every day of your life he gets acquainted. Then, after he has watched you and after you have demonstrated your faithfulness by your service and by your ability to keep your priorities straight in your life, along comes a need for a high councilor, a Primary president, a Relief Society president, a bishop, or a stake president; and the Lord makes it known to the responsible priesthood leader that you are ready because you have lived up to the commitments and promises that you made before you were ever born.

I would like to encourage you this morning with all the strength of my soul to learn to build a real relationship with the Savior of the world. I do not know of anything that is more important than to know that you are in tune with him. I do not think that it is an easy thing; I think that it takes a great deal of living. It takes fasting, it takes mighty prayer, it takes diligent and committed service, it takes a

happy heart in one who is anxiously engaged in a good work.

As you pray, may I encourage you to think in terms of to whom you are speaking. I have heard missionaries pray; I have heard my own children pray; I have heard others pray; and sometimes I get the feeling that we really do not realize whom we are addressing. I do not believe any of you would go in to an employer here on earth and report to him as we sometimes have a tendency to report to Heavenly Father. Be prepared in every way to build your communication with your Heavenly Father, to be entitled to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost and the promptings of the spirit of Jesus Christ.

May I tell you of a special experience. I am sure that I can share with you in this story what I am trying to encourage you to understand. Shortly after I was called to the First Quorum of the Seventy I went back to my mission in Canada—that was in April of 1976—and in May, the next month, we held a solemn assembly in eastern Canada for all of the priesthood leaders. The First Presidency, the members of the Twelve, and one of the assistants to the Twelve came at that time to hold that solemn assembly. It was a glorious experience. I was placed as the chairman because I was the presiding priesthood authority in the area.

At the end of the solemn assembly we had a light dinner for the Brethren and then I drove the First Presidency back to the hotel where they were staying. I might mention as a side-light that I have never driven more carefully in all my life than when I had the most precious cargo in this world in my car. When we arrived at the hotel, the Brethren bade me good night and went to the ninth floor. Then I noticed that President Kimball's secretary, Arthur Haycock, had been detained at the counter, so I went over and asked him if I could take the key up to President Kimball so that he might get into his room. He appreciated my offering to do that and handed me the key. I took the elevator

to the ninth floor and went down the hall. There standing in the doorway I saw President Tanner and President Kimball. As I approached them I said, "President, here is your key. I thought I'd bring it up to you so you could get in and have a good night's rest."

He thanked me for that in his loving way and then President Tanner took my arm and said, "Russ, how would you like to come in and have prayer with us?" You missionaries that are getting ready to go on your missions and you who have returned, can you imagine closing the day with the First Presidency of the Church? I had never done that before. I had never had that experience, and as I went into President Tanner's room with President Kimball, it was but a moment before President Romney and the other Brethren came in. I was overwhelmed. I have to tell you that tears welled up in my eyes as we knelt down around that bed.

I was kneeling next to President Tanner when President Kimball said, "Eldon, this is your room. Whom would you like to have pray?" I think President Tanner sensed what was happening to me, for he said, "President, we would like you to pray." And then I heard a prophet pray. I would like you to understand, you wonderful young people, that I learned a great lesson in that prayer. I felt the Spirit as I had never felt it before—you can understand it—for when a prophet talks to God, it is as close friends speaking.

But in a very short prayer he said this, among other things: "And, Heavenly Father, we pray above everything else that the labors of this day have been acceptable unto thee." That penetrated my heart like nothing else has on the principle of prayer. Oh, that every one of us might always be found closing the day pleading with the Lord that the efforts of that day had been acceptable unto him! There is great power in that. There is great strength in understanding that he is our Father, that we

are his sons and daughters, that we are on his errand. May our labors always be acceptable.

To you missionaries that are about to go out, may I suggest this to you: Make a commitment down in the bottom of your heart right now that you will never spend any day on your mission when you cannot honestly say to the Lord upon retiring, "Today I did the very best I knew how." I promise you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that if you can honestly say that you do not need to worry about baptisms. You will not need to worry about success; you will have it if you can honestly check in with your Heavenly Father every night saying, "Today I have done the very best I know how." I would ask you, then, to be committed from the crown of your head to the soles of your feet, to prepare yourself in every way to be ready when the Lord calls. Whatever that calling might be, be sure you have done today and will do tomorrow and every day all you can to prepare to be a leader of the Church in 1988.

I believe that you should know that as I move around the Church and as I become more familiar with it, I would be less than honest not to tell you that I have been overwhelmed in the last eleven months at the power and the magnitude of this great Church. I have been in Korea, in the Philippines, in Guam, in Hong Kong, in England, and all over the United States and parts of Canada, and my testimony to you this morning of that short eleven months is that the Lord is moving very rapidly in the saving of those who are honest in heart. The Church moves forward, as I observe it, in almost direct proportion to the dedication, the commitment, and the prayerful guidance that the Lord gives to his priesthood leaders.

I have had the opportunity to interview many people. Recently I interviewed a young man for a mission. We had a nice visit and then I looked him in the eye and said, "Now, my boy, tell me how you feel about the Lord Jesus

Christ.” He talked to me about that and I felt he was sincere.

I then said to him, “Would you do anything in this world that the Lord asked you to do?”

He said, “Oh, yes.”

“Would you give your life if necessary, if he called upon you to do it? Do you love him that much?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Now, my boy, tell me how you feel about the Prophet Joseph Smith,” I let him testify to me about those feelings.

Then I asked him a very penetrating question that I would like to ask each of you, and especially you missionaries that are here this morning: “Have you read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover? Have you pondered and prayed about it, and do you know it to be true?”

This young man’s eyes dropped and then he raised them back up and said, “Well, I’ve read parts of the Book of Mormon; I feel good about Joseph Smith, and I feel good about the Book of Mormon.”

I asked him, “Would you feel terrible if I gave a commitment and a challenge to you today? You can go on your mission the minute you can testify to your stake president that you have read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover, have pondered and prayed about it, and know that it is true. The minute you can do that, then you can go. But I don’t think you should go on your mission to testify of this great restoration of the gospel unless you know that.”

I shall tell you why I have that counsel and why I would counsel you this way. As you get out in your mission field and out into life, the winds will blow against you. You will continue to be tested. That is the purpose of all life. That is the reason we have been sent here, to determine just how committed and dedicated we really are. So the test will continue. Some of you who have returned from your mission are still being tested—have you noticed that? It is not all easy, is it? But if you have a foundation

built under you, an anchoring testimony of your own that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that he looked up through that grove of trees as God the Eternal Father and his Son Jesus Christ appeared to him, if you have a testimony of your own that he translated by the gift and power of God the Book of Mormon, you have nothing to fear. You will be prepared. If you have done that homework, then I would say to you, “Get with it.”

When I spoke to a group of missionaries the other day, I asked the missionaries a question that I am now going to ask you. I want you to be totally honest because I think it is important for the brethren here on the stand and for all of us to see where we really are on this issue. How many of you have read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover and have pondered and prayed about it and know that it is true? Would you raise your hands for me, please? [hands are raised] This is a good response.

Among the missionaries the other day about sixty percent of the hands went up. That meant that forty percent did not. There were some hands that did not go up here this morning. Will you take the challenge from me to read the Book of Mormon, to study and ponder about it, and to build your own solid testimony based on the mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the divine nature of the Book of Mormon, and the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ? If you do those three things, I say to you that you will be ready in 1988, or sooner, when the Lord reaches out and says through a priesthood leader that presides over you, “We need an elders quorum president; come, fulfill that calling. We need a Relief Society president; come, fulfill that calling.”

I would like to share just one quick story that I think might point out to you the importance of what I am trying to say. A student that was going to this University came to my home a few weeks ago with a lovely girl. He had given her a ring and they were to be married in

June. They were in my home to ask me what I thought about it. My missionaries often bring their girlfriends for me to interview to be sure they are all right. This girl was certainly all right as far as I was concerned. We set the date. This was on a Friday night. Saturday evening, about nine o'clock at night, I received a telephone call. The dialogue went something like this:

"President Ballard?"

"Yes?"

"This is Brother So-and-so of the bishopric. I have some terrible news."

"Oh? What is it?"

"One of your missionaries has been killed."

"Oh, no! Who?"

Then he told me that the young man who had been in my home less than twenty-four hours earlier was gone. And so, rather than standing in the temple in a sealing room to seal that lovely girl to that worthy, faithful young man, three days later I, as his mission president, was preaching his funeral sermon. I do not suppose that I shall ever have a more difficult assignment than that, with that lovely girl and the parents and family sitting on the front row. The chapel was filled as if it were stake conference, and all were sitting there with the same question in their mind: "Why? Why did this happen?" I was impressed to say this, which I will say to you:

"Do not worry about my missionary; he is all right. He, as far as I know, was worthy in every way because he had lived up to all of the commitments, challenges, and blessings that he had taken upon himself in the temple and through the waters of baptism. Do not worry about him; let us worry that we, from this day forward, are preparing ourselves to be as ready when our time comes as he was."

My dear fellow students, prepare for tomorrow. We need you. Oh, how the Lord needs you in 1988! If we have the Church as vibrant and growing and expanded as I think we will have, in 1988 I would not be a bit surprised if many of you who are sitting here would be

serving in stake presidencies, in bishoprics, in stake leadership assignments, and on high councils—and, yes, there may even be one of you or more serving in the general councils of the Church. You will only serve there, you will only receive the call, if you are ready. So my plea to you this morning for prepared leadership has never been more critical in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints than it is today.

I now understand abundantly why the prophets have said that the Lord reserved for this last day some of his very choice spiritual sons and daughters. I understand why you have been reserved to come forth now: because he needs you. He needs you desperately in the building of his kingdom. And the Kingdom will expand and move to new horizons by 1988 in direct proportion to how well you are prepared to assume your assignment in leading the kingdom of God on to ever greater heights. For this is how we must prepare for that long-awaited day, the day when the Savior of the world will say, "It is enough," and will come and rule and reign as the King of Kings over his own kingdom here upon the earth.

May God bless each one of you. You are so precious to us. We, the Brethren, are overwhelmed with the goodness of the youth of the Church. Everywhere I go, in every stake, I see faces like yours; what a reassurance that is to me, for I think that we are in good hands. But I ask you in all sincerity, with all the power of my soul, that if there is anything that needs correcting in your life, get to your bishop today. If there are any commitments that you need to make more strongly, write them down in your journal tonight. Resolve what you have to do to be better and leave this great auditorium today with this commitment: "Heavenly Father, I will be ready in every way—spiritually, physically, emotionally—for whatever it is that thou wouldst have me do in the building of the kingdom on the earth."

May you have peace in your own heart, knowing that all is well. May the Lord bless your families and may he bless the apartments that you live in here on this campus, that his Spirit will be there in abundance. May all these blessings be yours and ours all the days of our lives and through the eternities, I would ask humbly, and I do it all in the sacred and beloved name of Jesus Christ. Amen.