

The Sure Foundation

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Cuzco, Peru

In 1969 I had the privilege of living in the enchanting city of Cuzco, Peru. Each day as my missionary companion and I walked along the stone streets of Cuzco, I never ceased to marvel. Much of the city is literally built on ancient Inca ruins. The workmanship of the carved stones, all fit together without mortar, is exquisite. The strength of such walls made from precisely cut stones, many with interior interlocking arms (somewhat like giant ancient Legos), is incredible. It is ironic that we call them “ruins” because, even though they were constructed many centuries ago, most of them remain perfectly intact today.

Peru is a land of many earthquakes. We are familiar with the terrible destruction of the 2007 quake there. Tens of thousands were left homeless as buildings in a large region collapsed from the powerful tremors. Many are still trying to rebuild their homes and their lives. Through the centuries such disasters have occurred repeatedly in Peru. While more recently built construction crumbles, the Inca-built structures remain. Somehow these ancient stones, fit together perfectly, withstand whatever natural disasters occur. They remain a firm foundation.

You are familiar with Christ’s teaching:

Therefore, whoso heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock—

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. [3 Nephi 14:24–25; see also Matthew 7:24–25]

Isfahan, Iran

In 1976 my wife, Diane, and I, along with our two small children, traveled to Iran, where I had a contract through an American company to teach English to Iranian air force pilots. These pilots were in flight school being taught in English by American instructors to fly modern military aircraft. American-Iranian relations were very different then than they are today.

While in Iran we lived in Isfahan, an ancient city with beautiful mosques, bridges, fountains, and parks. We witnessed some of the amazing workmanship from the glory days of ancient Persia. These centuries-old treasures were obviously built on solid foundations.

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During our stay in Isfahan we rented a house in a new, rapidly spreading area on the outskirts of the city called “the flats.” Many of the houses there were being built quickly for rental to foreigners, particularly Americans, who were coming in large numbers to work on various projects going on in Iran at the time. The house we rented was brand new. It lacked some of the comforts and conveniences we were used to, but it had other luxuries that were new to us, such as beautiful chandeliers and marble floors.

One day while we were out walking in our neighborhood, we observed preparations being made to build a new house—workers were clearing the ground, moving rocks and piles of dirt. A day or two later we saw chalk lines on the ground showing where the walls were to be located, both exterior and interior. Within days, piles of mud adobe bricks appeared, and the walls began to rise on the bare ground where the chalk lines indicated. My wife and I asked each other, “Where is the foundation?”

Ironically, about this very same time, we began experiencing problems in our house. We could hear what sounded like water running in the house even when all of the faucets were turned off. One day as my wife was eating lunch with the children in the kitchen, she heard a strange, loud noise. She turned and watched, in shock, as the floor in the large entry room adjacent to the kitchen caved in. Later, as I returned home to the scene, I also found that the wall of the garage had begun to disintegrate into oozing mud. A leak in the water pipe located in the dirt directly beneath the house was literally washing away the foundation of our house. We were experiencing firsthand the problems of a house built on a sandy foundation. Though our house had many ornate features and fancy materials, its foundation was weak. We moved out, and, unfortunately, the landlord was left with a total disaster.

Christ warned:

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand—

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it. [3 Nephi 14:26–27; see also Matthew 7:26–27]

Our house in Isfahan didn’t even require a strong storm to bring it down, only a small leak in a water pipe underneath it.

Christ Is the Sure Foundation

Much more important than the foundations of houses or buildings or bridges are the foundations upon which we build our lives. Our true desires, priorities, and aspirations guide our lives now and will determine our future possibilities. The spiritual foundation upon which we choose to build can be a firm, sure foundation or a weak, sandy one.

Helaman counseled:

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; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, . . . and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you . . . because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall. [Helaman 5:12]

Today we sang the hymn “How Firm a Foundation” (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 85). The foundation of which we sing is, of course, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the sure foundation. I will now relate three experiences of family members, which illustrate the powerful effect of the words and message of this hymn and the sure foundation upon which we must build our lives.

Amanda Barnes Smith

My third great-grandmother Amanda Barnes Smith witnessed the terrible tragedy known as the Haun's Mill Massacre on October 30, 1838. Just hours after arriving at the settlement in Missouri, Amanda's husband, Warren, and her son Sardius were shot and killed along with 13 others by invading mobsters. Amanda, with her two daughters and two other sons, survived. Her six-year-old son, Alma, however, was critically wounded, his hip blown away by gunshot. As the grief-stricken wife and mother tried to deal with the shock and the horror of the situation, she later related:

We laid little Alma on a bed in our tent and I examined the wound. It was a ghastly sight. I knew not what to do. It was night now. . . . Yet was I there, all that long, dreadful night, with my dead and my wounded, and none but God as our physician and help. "Oh my Heavenly Father, I cried, what shall I do? Thou seest my poor wounded boy and knowest my inexperience. Oh, Heavenly Father, direct me what to do!" And then I was directed as by a voice speaking to me.

Amanda goes on to describe how she followed the promptings to repeatedly clean the wound with a cloth saturated with lye from the hickory ashes of their smoldering fire. She then placed a poultice made from the roots of a slippery-elm tree into the wound. After covering the wound with linen, she poured a bottle of balsam into the wound, which greatly soothed Alma's pain. She then laid him on a bed, facedown, and instructed him: "Now you lie like that, and don't move, and the Lord will make you another hip."

In the desperate days and weeks that followed, she and a few other bereaved widows who could not flee stayed behind at the home of Brother David Evans. I continue, in Amanda's words:

In our utter desolation, what could we women do but pray? Prayer was our only source of comfort; our Heavenly Father our only helper. . . . One day a mobber came from the mill with the captain's fiat: "the captain says if you women don't stop your d__d prayer he will send down a posse and kill every d__d one of you!" . . . Our prayers were hushed in terror. We dared not let our voices be heard in the house in supplication. I could pray in my bed or in silence, but I could not live thus long. This godless silence was more intolerable than had been that night of the massacre. I could bear it no longer. I pined to hear once more my own voice in petition to my Heavenly Father.

I stole down into a cornfield, and crawled into a "stout of corn." It was a temple of the Lord to me at that moment. I prayed aloud and most fervently. When I emerged from the corn a voice spoke to me. It was a voice as plain as I ever heard one. It was . . . a voice, repeating a verse of the Saint's hymn [as we sang today]:

"The soul who on Jesus hath leaned for repose

"I will not, I cannot desert to its foes;

"That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,

"I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"

From that moment I had no more fear. I felt that nothing could hurt me. [Journal of Amanda Barnes Smith, unpublished manuscript]

After five weeks Alma miraculously recovered. Amanda and her surviving children left Missouri for Quincy, Illinois, then Nauvoo. They later came west with the Saints, Alma driving a wagon the full distance. He later married, had a family, and served four missions for the Church. Amanda remained faithful and experienced the Lord's promised blessing. Through the years Amanda's example of faith and reliance upon the firm foundation of the Savior for strength has continued to inspire her many descendants.

Hal Loren Taylor

One of Amanda's great-great grandsons is Hal Loren Taylor, my father. In February 1966 he was serving as president of the Southwest Indian Mission, headquartered in Holbrook, Arizona. While in Salt Lake City for training meetings, he and my mother had to take my two-year-old sister, Susan, who was critically ill, to the Primary Children's Hospital. When the meetings concluded, Dad left Mom and Susie there in the hospital in Salt Lake City while he returned to the mission in Arizona. He later recounted,

I had a terrible cloud of discouragement over me and I didn't want to leave them. . . . This heaviness seemed to become worse the closer I got to Holbrook. When I arrived that night, I was so discouraged that I felt I would simply work and work hard enough that I might overcome this terrible feeling.

He started going through the large stack of letters on his desk. A thick letter from a friend who worked out on the Indian reservation caught his attention. He opened it and began to read, hoping to receive some words of encouragement. Instead, the letter contained harsh criticism of him personally and his approach to teaching the gospel to the Lamanites. He stopped reading partway through the letter, his discouragement reaching a new low. He buried his face in his hands and cried aloud, "What am I doing down here?" feeling that the Lord had forsaken him. In that moment the following occurred:

I no more than said those words when a glorious spiritual experience took place where in it was brought so clearly to my mind that I thought someone was speaking these words to me: "Fear not, I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am Thy God and will still give thee aid. I'll strengthen thee, I'll help thee, and cause thee to stand." That is where the message ended. I looked up from having my head in my hands almost expecting to see someone, or the words written on the wall, because of the glorious

feeling which I had. I saw no one, but know that somehow the Lord was giving me the encouragement which I badly needed. I remember straightening up my shoulders and raising my head and feeling a strength that I had never felt before. . . . I realized like I had never realized before that the Lord did not neglect his servants. I cannot remember ever having a real discouraging feeling for the next two and a half years of mission work. [Personal history of Hal Loren Taylor, unpublished manuscript]

My sister, Susie, survived. Although she still has health challenges, she is today the happy mother of a missionary son who this week completes his service in Chicago, Illinois. My father finished his mission in Arizona and four more that followed, faithfully relying on that firm foundation, the Savior. My father recently celebrated his 92nd birthday.

Lindy Taylor Barrett

Now move forward two generations to an experience of Hal's granddaughter, and Amanda's fourth great-granddaughter, Lindy Taylor. In 1998 while serving as a missionary in Bangkok, Thailand, she and her companion were teaching two investigators who had just committed to be baptized the following week. Suddenly an intense feeling of fear and uncertainty overcame Lindy. As they left the church, her Thai companion, Sister Wanprasite, sensed Lindy's anxiety and began to sing, "Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be not dismayed" ("How Firm a Foundation," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 85). Lindy wrote:

As we rode our bikes from the church, the hymn echoed in my ears. . . . "I'll strengthen thee, help thee and cause thee to stand." As we approached the corner I heard the sound of a truck coming down the road. The Spirit told me in a direct and forceful way to stop right where I was. I told Sister Wanprasite, who was behind me, to stop too. I looked and saw a huge garbage truck barreling down the street. . . . It was coming so fast we didn't have time to do anything. All of a sudden the truck swung around

the corner [just in front of us] barely missing us. . . . I felt God's protection, the presence of his angels. "Fear not, I am with thee." I came home last night knowing that, in my efforts to help others gain a testimony and in our own individual lives, we must have faith. [Letter from Lindy Taylor to her family, dated March 23, 1998; emphasis in original]

The two young ladies who were taught that night were baptized the following week and remain faithful members of the Church. Our daughter Lindy (now Lindy Barrett) is here today, a valiant wife and mother. And the faithful links of the family continue on, built on that sure foundation that never faileth.

The Lord reminded Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, and all of us:

Therefore, fear not, little flock; do good; let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail. . . .

Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not. [D&C 6:34, 36]

How Do We Build on the Sure Foundation?

Finally, let us consider the all-important question: How? How do we build the foundation of our lives on Jesus Christ, the sure foundation? The answer may seem simple, but in reality is supernally profound: we make and keep sacred covenants with Him. In the waters of baptism, in weekly sacrament meetings, and in holy temples, we promise to take His name upon us, to always remember Him and His Atonement, and to keep His commandments which He has given us (see D&C 20:77). In other words, we covenant to make Jesus Christ the foundation of our lives. Our thoughts, desires, and actions are centered on our relationship with Him. As we do this, He promises to bless us with His spirit, His guidance, His help, and His support. Of this we can be totally confident, for the Lord keeps His promises.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught the following in the October 2008 general conference:

When we join in the solemnity that should always accompany the ordinance of the sacrament . . . we are qualified for the companionship and revelation of the Spirit. This is the way we get direction for our lives and peace along the way.

The resurrected Lord emphasized the importance of the sacrament when He visited the American continent and instituted this ordinance among the faithful Nephites. He blessed the emblems of the sacrament and gave them to His disciples and the multitude (see 3 Nephi 18:1–10), commanding:

"And this shall ye always do to those who repent and are baptized in my name; and ye shall do it in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you, that ye may witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you.

". . . And if ye shall always do these things blessed are ye, for ye are built upon my rock.

*"But whoso among you shall do more or less than these are not built upon my rock, but are built upon a sandy foundation; and when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon them, they shall fall" (3 Nephi 18:11–13). [Dallin H. Oaks, "Sacrament Meeting and the Sacrament," *Ensign*, November 2008, 19]*

To this I add my witness that as we make and keep these sacred covenants with the Lord, He will keep His promises to us. Our lives will be built on that sure foundation, and there will be no need to fear. We will receive guidance and encouragement and strength in times of need, for He understands how to succor us perfectly because He has suffered all of our fears, pains, temptations, and infirmities (see Alma 7:11–12). Our personal infirmities are overcome through the firm foundation, Jesus Christ, the Rock of our Salvation. Of this I bear testimony, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.