

# “In God We Trust”

ROBERT E. WELLS

**B**rothers and sisters, this really is a great privilege for me, and I pray that you and I might be united by the Spirit, that together we might be uplifted and rejoice in the beautiful things of the gospel. To begin my comments let me show you something I have here in my hand. It's a silver dollar from Las Vegas, Nevada, where I was born and raised. At the age of fourteen I used to carry thousands of these up and down Fremont Street to the various casinos there. In fact, at the age of fourteen, I was so important in the banking industry in Las Vegas that I had the key to the front door of every bank in the entire valley—both of them! The city has grown a lot since that time.

## **Trust in the Lord**

On this silver dollar it says, “In God We Trust,” and that is the theme that I would like to follow for my comments. In God we trust, and indeed we do. In fact, we must. Our salvation depends upon it. We trust Him even when we do not understand all of the things that may be happening about us or happening in our lives. One of the classic stories of the scriptures is the one about the woman of Canaan. She had a daughter seriously ill, and she approached the Savior asking that he would bless and heal her daughter. He did not respond. She then

went to the apostles and pleaded with them. They apparently felt that she was bothering them because they went to the Savior and said, “Send her away for she crieth after us.” She must have insisted again. This time the Savior answered, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” She did not accept the negative response; she insisted some more. She worshiped Him, and the scriptures say she pleaded with Him, “Lord, help me.” This time He answered, “It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs.” She could have been offended at that. In fact, I imagine that she may have been. She may not have understood. It may have hurt her deeply. Yet, she trusted in the Lord so much that she replied, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.” The Savior answered, “O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt” (Matthew 15:21–28). And her daughter was healed from that very hour. But imagine the

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trust that she had in Him even when she did not understand why at first He was apparently not willing to help her.

I know a man in Bucaramanga, Columbia. Now if you don't know where Bucaramanga is, it's close to Barrancabermeja. He joined the Church about ten years ago, and, the first time the mission president came through that city, the mission president had the difficult job of telling his brother that he would not be able to occupy certain positions in the Church, nor would he be able to perform the ordinances of the Church. This good black brother was hurt, was offended, just like the sister of Canaan, yet he trusted in the Lord. Even not understanding, he remained faithful. Some eight years later the revelation (to give priesthood to all) was received. Last December I was assigned to go to Bucaramanga to form the first stake in that city. I was thrilled, I was inspired, I enjoyed that stake conference as few other spiritual occasions because, as I interviewed the various priesthood leaders of that stake, there was that moment of inspiration when I saw the mantle of the Lord descend upon Brother Insignares, that handsome black man, and he was called as the new stake president. It was a moment of great rejoicing to place my hands on his head and with that special authority ordain him a high priest and set him apart as the first stake president in Bucaramanga. He is a man whom I honor and respect highly. For many long years he trusted in the Lord even though he did not understand.

We should trust in the Lord even in disappointment, in discouragement, in moments when things seem to be going against us, in defeat. I think long ago we learned that the Lord does not answer all our prayers, and I think we learned that he does not answer all the prayers that we offer for athletic events, for victory in this, or to win that scholarship, or to get the job that we've been interviewing for. In these circumstances, where we have been pray-

ing and yet our dreams have not been fulfilled, we need to learn to trust in the Lord.

I think the most classical account illustrating this point is the great story of President Hugh B. Brown and the currant bush. There are several versions of this story, but let me tell it the way that I remember it from the time I translated it for President Brown in South America. He said that, when he was a young married man, he lived in a humble home, but he had a garden in front of the home that he was very proud of. This garden had a lawn and flowers; it had some shrubs and fruit bushes, and it had some trees, large trees for shade. One day he noticed the currant bush, which he had pruned to a certain shape in order to keep the majority of the strength of the tree in the roots and to produce good fruit, had lost its shape. Apparently several months had gone by without due attention to it, and it was sprouting irregular branches. He got the pruning shears and proceeded to cut back the branches of that currant bush. As he cut them, he seemed to hear the bush say to him, "Oh, don't do that, don't do that to me! Don't cut me back. I want to be tall and big like the shade trees. Let me grow!"

And he said, "No, my little bush, I'm the gardener here, and I want to prune you back to the size that I have decided is right for you."

A number of years later President Brown was a colonel in the British Forces in World War I in France. He was the ranking colonel of the Canadian forces. He had decided to make the military career his life's profession. He had studied hard; he had worked hard. He had had great success; he had been promoted and advanced. He was now colonel, and the next position would be general. In fact, he dreamed of being perhaps the first Mormon general since Book of Mormon days. A sudden vacancy occurred, and it was his turn to be promoted. He knew it, and yet they called him in and advised him that someone else was being promoted over his head. He wondered if it was

because they had never had a Mormon general and probably were now deciding that they would not have a Mormon in that position of rank and authority. He returned to his tent, knelt by his cot, and cried to the Lord, "Why couldn't my prayers have been answered? I've been faithful to my covenants. I've been active in the Church. I've done all the things I should do to merit this promotion. It's been my ambition. There's no reason why I should have been denied this. Why couldst Thou not have answered my prayers?"

And then he seemed to hear a voice saying, "I'm the gardener here, and I'm going to prune you to the size that I want you to be in my garden."

Do we have the trust in the Lord that we can see His purposes fulfilled even in disappointment and in discouragement? Not to say anything against the military profession, of course, which is noble and honorable and much needed, but had President Brown followed that particular career, I doubt that he would have developed those characteristics, qualities, attributes, and skills which made him one of our greatest apostles, one of our greatest counselors in the First Presidency, one of the most eloquent orators that we ever have had in the Church.

### **Trust in Leaders**

Another element of trust: trust in your leaders. There are many ways to illustrate this, but a story comes to my mind that I'm particularly close to. It appeals to me because it involves my dear wife's father. Brother Walser was one of the Mormon colonists in Mexico when this incident happened, and afterwards he was one of the witnesses, having spoken with one of the men who was with Pancho Villa at the time this little miracle occurred. Pancho was very much incensed at the intervention of the United States in internal Mexican political affairs. I'll not go into all of the details, but in retaliation he took his army across the border into Texas and

proceeded to harass and burn and murder and so on. And then on returning into Mexico, he found the Mormon colonies directly in his path. He was angry; he was going to cause more trouble. The Mormon colonists knew that his army was approaching them, and they sensed the threat of danger, and so they met together. The bishop who was there with this particular group called all of the priesthood leaders together, and they discussed what they should do. Some said, "Well, we have our deer rifles and our shotguns. Let's defend ourselves." Another said, "No, let's take our wives and families and flee to the mountains." Another said, "Well, let's set up an ambush for them," or "Let's put dynamite in certain places" or let's do this, or let's do the other. There were different options. The bishop, a wise, humble man, facing several options that he felt he really was not competent to decide among, finally said, "I think we ought to go home, have prayers, turn out the lights, go to bed, and leave it in the hands of the Lord." Immediately there were some other discussions: "No, let's do this," and "No, let's do the other," and so on. Then one of the brethren stood up and said, "I'm going to follow the example of the bishop." Then another one did the same thing, and pretty soon they all went home, had prayers, turned out their lanterns, went to bed, and left it in the hands of the Lord.

Late that night Pancho Villa and his army arrived at the border of that little farming valley. He held up his hand, stopped the troops, and said, "Wait, there's an ambush. I can see the faint glimmers of fires all throughout the valley. The other army must have arrived here before we did." Others who were with him said, "No, we can't see anything." He disagreed strenuously with them and instructed the army to go around the valley and off in another direction. One of his guides was known to my father-in-law, who happened also to have been a guide for some of Pancho Villa's army in another case in which he was taken as a hostage and threat-

ened with his life unless he led them through a pass which he knew because of his deer hunting experiences. He was one of several witnesses to that incident where the men around Pancho Villa said, “We can’t see anything.” The colonists had done nothing but Pancho Villa himself could see remains of fires in the valley, and he was certain there was an ambush there threatening him.

Let us trust in our leaders. Trust in our leaders can be lost very easily. In fact, let me illustrate how easily it can be lost with another situation. There was a young man with whom I grew up in a Mormon community. He was active the same way I was. His parents were active and strong, but there was a situation that developed in that home. After every Church meeting on the way home and at home in that little farming community, the parents played one of their favorite indoor games:

He would say, “Honey, did you notice that the bishop made a mistake? He had to be corrected by his counselor in that announcement.”

And he would say, “Yes, and did you notice that the Sunday School superintendent made a mistake and announced the wrong hymn?”

And she would say, “Yes, and did you notice that the Sunday School teacher could have used better scriptures, and also got a little bit off the subject?”

Then she would say, “Did you notice so-and-so’s hat?”

In the process they diminished the efforts of the people who were there. It didn’t affect them. He went on to be called into the stake presidency. In fact, after that, I don’t think they commented very much about other people’s personal failings and weaknesses because they were then on the other side of the line. They later became temple workers. But that son— hearing the human frailties of the leaders— when he went into the service, when he continued his life, strayed far from the paths of the Church because he had not developed

a full trust and respect for the leaders of the Church in spite of their human frailties.

Trust in your leaders. They are called by inspiration. None of them sought the positions which they hold. Not a one of them went through an ambitious process of progress through the ranks, trying to become a bishop or a stake president or a mission president. Trust in your leaders because in this Church no one has actually sought the position to which he or she was called, and all of them are doing the very best that they can.

### **The Lord’s Ways Not Ours**

Trust in the Lord even in the death of a loved one, parent, brother or sister, companion, child. We are not the ones to decide when it’s the right time to pass through the veil to the next part of our eternal existence. We are the ones, though, who must trust in the Lord. The Holy Ghost really cannot accompany us, cannot give us consolation, cannot buoy us up in those times of difficulty if we are rebellious, and if we are disagreeing with the Lord. True it hurts; true there are the deep wounds, and we don’t understand. Yet, our ways are not the ways of the Lord.

There’s a story from Islam that I would like to repeat. I do not remember exactly where this story came from or how it was told originally. I heard it at a funeral many, many years ago. But I like the feeling that it gives to me in understanding the ways of the Lord. So without pretending to quote it exactly, let me tell you what I remember of that little story or parable. It seems that Moses wanted to accompany an angel who was being sent to the earth on an errand. Moses wanted to see what ministering angels do, and so he insisted that he ought to be allowed to accompany this angel. The angel said, “Thou couldst not stand what thou wouldst see.” Moses insisted, and the angel, perhaps outranked (we don’t know in this story), finally said, “As long as thou wilt

remain silent no matter what thou seest." Moses agreed to that.

The angel led Moses down to earth and out over the ocean, where there was a small boat filled with humble fisherfolk. The angel broke the boards on the bottom of the keel, the boat sank, and they all drowned. Moses said, "Good heavens, what are you doing? What terrible thing is this!"

The angel said, "Did I not say thou couldst not stand what thou wouldst see?"

They went on further. The angel saw an Arab boy walking across the sands. He breathed upon him, his blood froze cold, and he fell to the earth lifeless. Moses said, "What foul deed is this?" He complained, objecting.

And the angel said, "Did I not tell you thou couldst not stand what thou wouldst see?"

They went on to another place where a humble widow and her two sons lived. The only thing they really had to survive on was a small garden of melons and cucumbers and various vegetables surrounded by an adobe wall. The angel pushed the wall over, smothering the vines and plants. Moses really exploded at this, complaining, objecting: "How terrible can these deeds be? What hire hast thou for this?"

And the angel said, "Thou couldst not stand with me; thou canst go no longer with me." Then he explained what he was doing lest Moses not understand the purposes of the Lord. He said, "There was a pirate coming from over the horizon who would have made those fishermen slaves, would have tortured them and stolen their boat, anyway. This way they went quickly and easily. With regard to the Arab boy, soon he would have killed a mother's son. This way he died guiltless, and the other son lives. The father of that little family, before his death, hid a treasure at the base of that wall. Now, as his wife and sons build it up again, they will find the hidden wealth and will prosper. But thou, thou couldst not stand

the things which thou didst see. Thou canst go with me no longer."

Can we trust the Lord in all things, in all circumstances? Can we trust Him in matters of tithing, in doctrinal subjects that we do not yet understand, in history which perhaps is not totally explained and we do not see the other side of things? Can we trust Him in our patriarchal blessings? Can we trust Him in our mission calls, no matter what the destination? It may not be a romantic place to which we are sent, far away over the sea. It may not be a mission call which we are really anticipating, about which we are excited. Wherever the Lord sends you, you have a date with destiny. Someday you will know why you were sent to that mission, to those people, to that mission president, to those companions. The day will come. I'm remembering a case in South America where a missionary was sent from Sweden. To his surprise he found that he was assigned to a missionary, a local Chilean missionary, who was sending letters to the same city in Sweden where the Swedish missionary's parents lived. The two missionaries began comparing notes, and the Chilean missionary's parents were not members of the Church. They were exiled for political reasons, working in Sweden. The Swedish missionary's parents were members of the Church, active. The two missionaries combined their efforts so that the Swedish parents visited the Chilean parents and converted them. There was no indication anywhere when that missionary application came through that there would be a Chilean missionary whose parents were from the same city. Imagine the inspiration it required for the prophet to send him to Chile. Imagine that mission president's surprise when asked, "Why did you put them together?"

He replied, "Well, the Swedish companion needed a local Chilean's Spanish in order to develop his language ability."

There are many such circumstances. I don't have time to tell all the beautiful stories that

illustrate that there is date with destiny for you in the mission field in the mission to which you are called.

### **Character, Capacity, Capital**

I wish that this coin in my pocket—the one with “In God We Trust” on one side—had on the other side, “Can God Trust Me?” I spent almost twenty years in a profession learning how to trust people with money. Bankers develop a formula. One basic, simple formula we use to decide whether we can trust people with money consists of the three C’s of credit: character, capacity, and capital.

*Character* is pretty much the same in banking as it is in whatever formula the Lord would have. It’s that decision about whether you can trust a person. If things are difficult for him when his loan comes due, will he do everything in his power to pay off the loan or will he hide, will he flee, will he declare bankruptcy unnecessarily?

I think part of our test here on the earth is for the Lord to decide if He can trust us with regard to all of the commandments. You have all probably heard the little story of the two young men from Utah studying at an eastern university. One of them noticed and mentioned to his companion, “These other fellows break all the commandments. They don’t do the things we’re doing, and yet their grades seem to be just about the same as our grades. I think I’ll go out and do the things they’re doing.”

His companion said, “You can’t do it.”

His friend asked, “Why can’t I?”

He replied “Because you know better. To do so, to break the commandments would be to break your character. It would be a character flaw in you to do so. That’s why we can’t do it; we know better.”

President McKay said once,

*Man’s chief concern in life should not be the acquiring of gold or of fame or of material possessions. It should not be the development of physical*

*proWess nor of intellectual strength, but his aim—the highest in life—should be the development of Christlike character.*

*Capacity*, the second of the three C’s: We know that the Lord expects us to develop all our talents, to magnify them, to become instruments in His hands to do His work, to do all the things that can really enable us to serve Him better. Of course, a banker is not going to loan money to someone who is inexperienced, who does not have the ability to manage, to supervise. I never loaned money to anyone who could not show me a track record of financial success. Here is what I think the Lord is saying to us when we’re talking about developing capacity. He says, “Be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine,” skipping a little bit in section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, verses 78 and 79:

*Be instructed . . . in . . . things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms.*

Why study all these things? Why study the disciplines that you are involved in? Here is the answer:

*That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you . . . to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you. [D&C 88:80]*

Now, there are many skills which the Lord expects us to develop and in which He expects us to have great expertise. I think He expects us—in one of the greatest assignments of this mortal existence—to learn companionship—to be a great eternal companion to a wife or a

husband. I think He expects us to learn all we can about proper fatherhood and motherhood. I think He expects us to understand everything that we can about homemaking, how to make a spiritual celestial existence in a home even in times of adversity, difficulty, rebellion of different members of the family as they go through the difficult teenage years—all of these things. I think the Lord expects us to learn to be a proper provider, to take care of ourselves and our family. I think the Lord expects us to learn missionary skills and to be able to preach the gospel all our lives. I think the Lord expects us to develop skills of management which would serve us in Church callings as well as in whatever our profession may be. People management, money management, delegation, the differences of administration, the diversities of operations, as the scriptures say—I think there are many, many things that the Lord expects us to develop as talents and gifts so that we might have the capacity which would enable him to trust us in any calling in life, any calling in the Church, or any circumstance.

I think the Lord expects us to develop *capital*. A banker does not loan to a client unless there is enough capital in reserve that, no matter what happens, the loan is relatively safe, and there are additional assets which can be used to satisfy the legal position of the banker. Now I think that the Lord looks at us in the same way and expects us to have a legal reserve in order to meet any circumstance, any crisis in life, any situation, without an emotional collapse that weakens us, without hiding, without running away.

One of my favorite stories about the attitude toward having a spiritual reserve to meet crises occurred in Salt Lake City. A number of years ago we came back to Salt Lake to live for a few years. I had almost always had my own aircraft in Latin America, but working for the Church one does not afford airplanes. So I was grounded for a while until a friend offered me his Cessna 320, a beautiful twin-engine aircraft

with all the extras on it. At first I turned him down, and then he insisted and gave me the keys. I finally gave in. “Great,” he said, “but on one condition: You have to pass the check ride that is necessary for the insurance.” So I had to make an appointment with an authorized instructor to take this check ride. I tried to impress the instructor the first time I met him there at the side of the aircraft. I had my log books, and I explained all the hours of flying across the jungles of South America and the Andes—the experience I had in that type aircraft.

He said, “Wells, I’ve heard of you. I understand you have flown quite a bit in Latin America and that you did learn to fly in the navy and so on.” But he said, “In my position”—and this is the important point of the whole story—“I have to assume that all those hours of flight occurred when nothing went wrong. Now you and I are going to fly this aircraft, and we’ll see how well you can fly it when everything goes wrong!”

For the next hour and a half or so, we did a check ride in which he turned things off that should be on and turned things on that should be off. He distracted me, made me look over there and then cut the left engine. Or he’d look at something over here and say, “This engine is on fire. What are you going to do?” He would cover up the instruments and try to confuse me. At the end he made a statement that I took as a grudging compliment. He said, “All right, I’d let my wife and kids fly with you.” He signed my log book, and I was accepted. In other words, he came to trust me because he could see the things I could do in an emergency situation.

Think of the trials of Job. I presume the Lord wanted to know how well Job could fly when everything went wrong. Do you and I have that kind of strength of spiritual reserve that we are emotionally self-sufficient? The Church preaches welfare self-sufficiency. Are we emotionally self-sufficient in all of the

matters that occur in our lives so that we don't, as they say in Spanish, *perder los estribos*—we don't lose our stirrups, or “ride off in all directions at once”?

### **Peace in Our Hearts**

I believe that the feeling that we have when our circumstances are in control, when we have so performed that the Lord can trust us, will be peace in our hearts. That's the promise of the Savior. He said, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but . . . I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Do you remember the great scripture in John? It's much better in Spanish. “*La paz os dejo, mi paz os doy. No como el mundo la da, yo os la doy.*” In English it goes, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27).

I believe that, as the Prince of Peace, He was not talking about the peace that you achieve with armies in the Falkland Islands or with air forces in Palestine. I think He was talking about the peace that we get when we live His commandments to the point that He can trust us in any circumstance. I believe fully that the relationship that needs to develop between ourselves and our Heavenly Father, between ourselves and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is that which can give us the kind of peace the early Christians had in their

afflictions and tribulations, going across the sands of the arena when the lions were turned out on them. They went to their deaths singing hymns of praise to their Lord because they had peace in their hearts, knowing that their treasures were in heaven. They had so lived their lives that not only would the Lord trust them here, but He would have treasures in heaven for them when they arrived there.

Brothers and sisters, may we trust in God; may He be able to trust in each one of us. I testify to you that our Heavenly Father lives and loves us. He is in His heaven; He hears our prayers and He answers them. I also testify that Jesus the Christ is much more than the child, the infant in the manger, much more than that body nailed on the cross with the hand-wrought Roman nails. He lives, He is resurrected, He is glorified, He is exalted, He stand physically at the head of this church which bears His name. His spokesman here on the earth is our prophet, President Kimball. And everything that we're preaching, everything that we're teaching from Joseph Smith to President Kimball, from the preexistence to the life to come, all of the ordinances, all of the doctrines, is true. I pray most humbly that the Lord will bless each and every one of us that our lives will please Him above, doing so humbly in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.