

I AMAZED AT THE LOVE JESUS OFFERS ME

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One of our favorite hymns begins with the words “I stand all amazed.”¹ As we think about Christ’s life, we are amazed in every way. We are amazed at His premortal role as the great Jehovah, agent of His Father, Creator of the earth, guardian of the entire family of man. We are amazed at His coming to earth and the circumstances surrounding His advent.

We are amazed that at only 12 years of age He was already about His Father’s business. We are amazed at the formal beginning of His ministry, His baptism and spiritual gifts.

We stand all amazed to know Jesus cast out and defeated the forces of evil everywhere He went, even as He made the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the infirm to stand. When I consider the Savior’s ministry, I wonder, “How did He do it?”

He Is Forgiving

I am most amazed at the moment when Jesus, after staggering under His load to the crest of Calvary, said, “Father, forgive

them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

If ever there is a moment when I indeed stand all amazed, it is this one. When I consider Him bearing the weight of all our sins and forgiving those who would nail Him to the cross, I ask not “How did He do it?” but “Why did He do it?” As I examine my life against the mercifulness of His, I find how I fail to do as much as I should in following the Master.

For me, this is a higher order of amazement. I am startled enough by His ability to heal the sick and raise the dead, but I have had some experience with healing in a limited way. We are all lesser vessels, but we have seen the miracles of the Lord repeated in our own lives and in our own homes and with our own portion of the priesthood. But mercy? Forgiveness? Atonement? Reconciliation? Too often, that is a different matter.

How could He forgive His tormenters at that moment? With all that pain, with blood having fallen from every pore, still He was thinking of others. This is yet one more amazing evidence that He really was perfect and intends us to be also. In the Sermon on the Mount, before He stated that perfection is



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our goal, He gave something of a last requirement. He said all must “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

This is one of the most difficult things to do.

Jesus Christ was the purest and only perfect person who ever lived. He is the one person in all the world from Adam to this present hour who deserved adoration and respect and admiration and love, and yet He was persecuted, abandoned, and put to death. Through it all, He would not condemn those who persecuted Him.

He Is the Perfect Sacrifice

When our first parents, Adam and Eve, had been cast out of the Garden of Eden, the Lord commanded them to “worship the Lord their God, and . . . offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord” (Moses 5:5). The angel told Adam, “This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth” (Moses 5:7).

Sacrifice served as a constant reminder of the humiliation and suffering the Son would pay to ransom us. It was a constant reminder of the meekness and mercy and gentleness—yes, the forgiveness—that was to mark every Christian life. For all these reasons and more, those firstborn lambs, clean and unblemished, perfect in every way, were offered on those stone altars year after year and generation after generation, pointing us toward the great Lamb of God, His Only Begotten Son, His Firstborn, perfect and without blemish.

In our dispensation, we are to partake of the sacrament—a symbolic offering that reflects our broken heart and contrite spirit (see D&C 59:8). As we partake, we promise to “always remember him and keep his commandments . . . ; that [we] may always have his Spirit to be with [us]” (D&C 20:77).

The symbols of the Lord’s sacrifice, in Adam’s day or our own, are to help us remember to live peacefully and

obediently and mercifully. These ordinances are to help us remember to demonstrate the gospel of Jesus Christ in our long-suffering and human kindness one for another, as He demonstrated it for us on that cross.

But over the centuries, too few have used these ordinances in the proper way. Cain was the first to offer an unacceptable sacrifice. As the Prophet Joseph Smith noted: “Abel offered to God a sacrifice that

was accepted, which was the firstlings of the flock. Cain offered of the fruit of the ground, and was not accepted, because he . . . could not exercise faith contrary to the plan of heaven. It must be shedding the blood of the Only Begotten to atone for man, for this was the plan of redemption, and without the shedding of blood was no remission. And as the sacrifice was instituted for a type by which man was to discern the great Sacrifice which God had prepared, to offer a sacrifice contrary to that, no faith could be exercised, because redemption was not purchased in that way, nor the power of atonement instituted after

that order. . . . Certainly, the shedding of the blood of a beast could be beneficial to no man, except it was done in imitation, or as a type, or explanation of what was to be offered through the gift of God Himself.”²

And so others in our day, a little Cain-like, return home after partaking of the sacrament to argue with a family member or lie or cheat or be angry with a neighbor.

Samuel, a prophet in Israel, commented on how futile it is to offer a sacrifice without honoring the meaning of the sacrifice. When Saul, king in Israel, had defied the Lord’s instructions by bringing back from the Amalekites “the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord [his] God,” Samuel cried: “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:15, 22).

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Saul offered sacrifice without comprehending the meaning of his sacrifice. Latter-day Saints who faithfully go to sacrament meeting but are no more merciful or patient or forgiving as a result are much the same. They go through the motions of the ordinances without an understanding of the purposes for which these ordinances were established. Those purposes are to help us be obedient and gentle in our search for forgiveness of our sins.

Remembering His Sacrifice

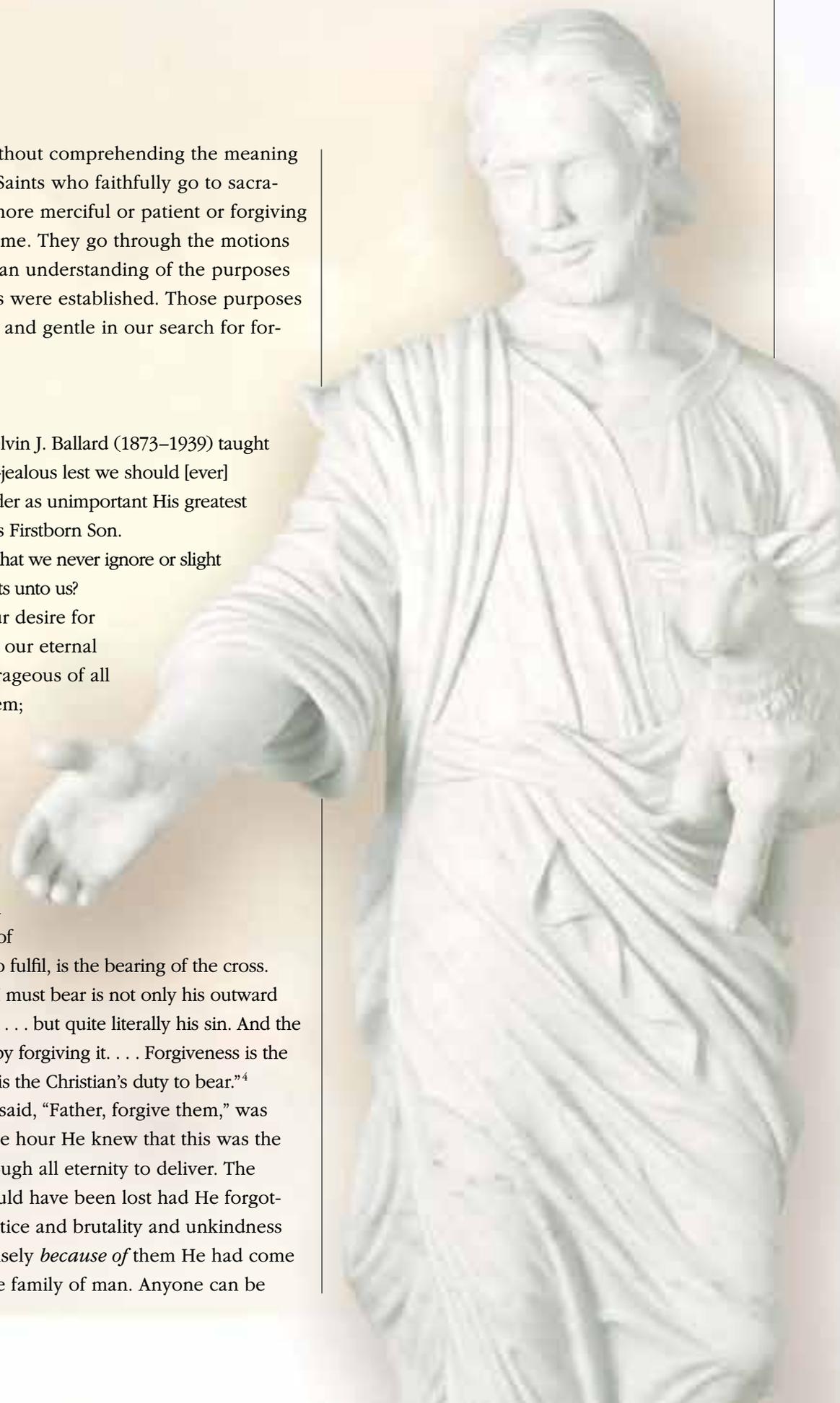
Many years ago, Elder Melvin J. Ballard (1873–1939) taught that God “is a jealous God—jealous lest we should [ever] ignore and forget and consider as unimportant His greatest gift unto us”³—the life of His Firstborn Son.

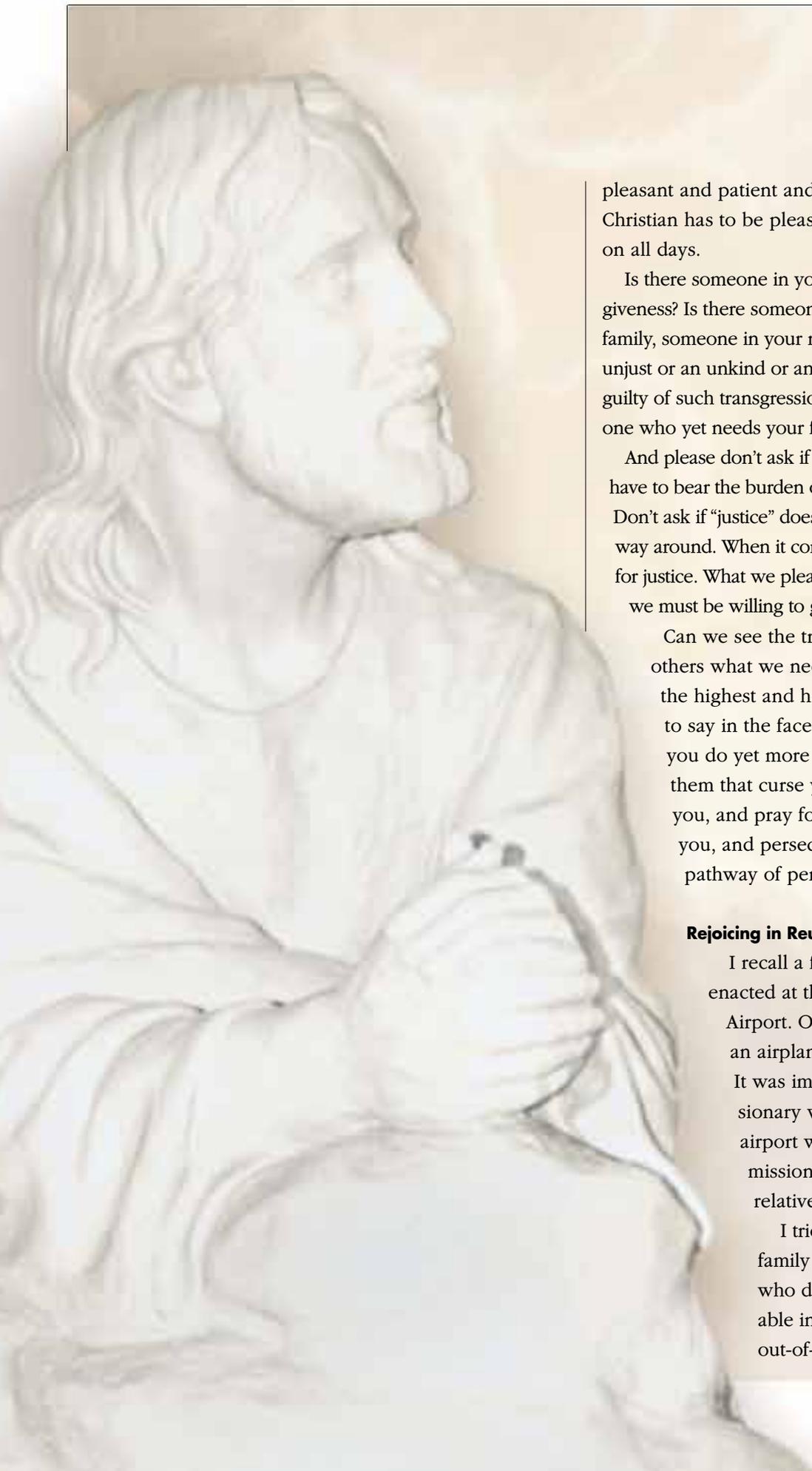
So how do we make sure that we never ignore or slight or forget His greatest of all gifts unto us?

We do so by showing our desire for a remission of our sins and our eternal gratitude for that most courageous of all prayers: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” We do so by joining in the work of forgiving sins.

“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2) [Paul commands us]. . . . The law of Christ, which it is our duty to fulfil, is the bearing of the cross. My brother’s burden which I must bear is not only his outward situation [and circumstance], . . . but quite literally his sin. And the only way to bear that sin is by forgiving it. . . . Forgiveness is the Christlike suffering which it is the Christian’s duty to bear.”⁴

Surely the reason Christ said, “Father, forgive them,” was because even in that terrible hour He knew that this was the message He had come through all eternity to deliver. The entire plan of salvation would have been lost had He forgotten that not *in spite of* injustice and brutality and unkindness and disobedience but precisely *because of* them He had come to extend forgiveness to the family of man. Anyone can be





pleasant and patient and forgiving on a good day. A Christian has to be pleasant and patient and forgiving on all days.

Is there someone in your life who perhaps needs forgiveness? Is there someone in your home, someone in your family, someone in your neighborhood who has done an unjust or an unkind or an unchristian thing? All of us are guilty of such transgressions, so there surely must be someone who yet needs your forgiveness.

And please don't ask if it is fair that the injured should have to bear the burden of forgiveness for the offender. Don't ask if "justice" doesn't demand that it be the other way around. When it comes to our own sins, we don't ask for justice. What we plead for is mercy—and that is what we must be willing to give.

Can we see the tragic irony of not granting to others what we need so badly ourselves? Perhaps the highest and holiest and purest act would be to say in the face of unkindness and injustice that you do yet more truly "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." That is the demanding pathway of perfection.

Rejoicing in Reunion

I recall a few years ago seeing a drama enacted at the Salt Lake International Airport. On this particular day, I got off an airplane and walked into the terminal. It was immediately obvious that a missionary was coming home because the airport was full of conspicuous-looking missionary friends and missionary relatives.

I tried to pick out the immediate family members. There was a father who did not look particularly comfortable in an awkward-fitting and slightly out-of-fashion suit. He seemed to be

a man of the soil, with a suntan and large, work-scarred hands.

There was a mother who was quite thin, looking as if she had worked very hard in her life. She had in her hand a handkerchief—and I think it must have been a linen handkerchief once, but now it looked like tissue paper. It was nearly shredded from the anticipation only the mother of a returning missionary could know.

Two or three younger brothers and sisters were running around, largely oblivious to the scene that was unfolding.

I found myself wondering as to who would be first to break away from the welcoming group. A look at the mother's handkerchief convinced me that she would probably be the one.

As I sat there, I saw the returning missionary appear. I knew he was the one by the squeals of excitement from the crowd. He looked like Captain Moroni, clean and handsome and straight and tall. Undoubtedly he had known the sacrifice this mission had meant to his father and mother.

As he neared the group, sure enough, someone couldn't wait any longer. It wasn't the mother, and it wasn't any of the children. It was Father. That big, slightly awkward, quiet, and bronzed giant of a man ran out and swept his son into his arms.

The missionary was probably 6'2" (188 cm) or so, but this big father grabbed him, lifted him off the ground, and held him for a long, long time. He just held him and said nothing. The boy put both arms around his dad, and they just held each other very tightly. It seemed like all eternity stood still. It was as if all the world had gone silent out of respect for such a sacred moment.

And then I thought of God the Eternal Father watching His Son go out to serve, to sacrifice when He didn't have to do it, paying His own expenses, so to speak,

costing everything He had saved all His life to give. At that precious moment, it was not too difficult to imagine that Father speaking with some emotion to those who could hear, "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). And it was also possible to imagine that triumphant returning Son saying, "It is finished" (John 19:30). "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

How do we make sure that we never ignore or slight or forget God's greatest of all gifts unto us—the life of His Firstborn Son? We do so by showing our desire for a remission of our sins and our eternal gratitude for that most courageous of all prayers: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." We do so by joining in the work of forgiving.

Wonderful to Me

Even in my limited imagination, I can see that reunion in the heavens. And I pray for one like it for you and for me. I pray for reconciliation and for forgiveness, for mercy, and for the Christian growth and Christian character we must develop if we are to enjoy such a moment fully.

I stand all amazed that even for a man like me, there is a chance. If I've heard the "good news" correctly, there really is a chance—for me and for you and for everyone who is willing to keep hoping and to keep trying and to allow others the same privilege.

I marvel that he would descend from his throne divine

*To rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine. . . .
I think of his hands pierced and bleeding to pay the debt!
Such mercy, such love, and devotion can I forget?
No, no, I will praise and adore at the mercy seat,
Until at the glorified throne I kneel at his feet. . . .
Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!⁵ **NE***

From an address given to Salt Lake Temple workers on November 24, 1985.

NOTES

1. "I Stand All Amazed," *Hymns*, no. 193.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 2007), 48.
3. *Melvin J. Ballard: Crusader for Righteousness* (1966), 136–37.
4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 2nd ed. (1959), 100.
5. *Hymns*, no. 193.