



This, the Greatest of All Dispensations

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I want to speak to you in the context of ongoing anxiety in the world and some of the challenges we face. Since September 11, 2001, we have been made more fearful and have been more alarmed by international events and the almost wholesale new use of the word *terror*. I know that many of you have wondered in your hearts what all of this means regarding the end of the world and your life in it. Many have asked, “Is this the hour of the Second Coming of the Savior and all that is prophesied surrounding that event?”

Indeed, sometime not long after 9/11, a missionary asked me in all honesty and full of faith, “Elder Holland, are these the last days?” I saw the earnestness in his face and some of the fear in his eyes. I said, “Yes, Elder, we are in the last days, but there is really nothing new about that. The promised Second Coming of the Savior began with the First Vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1820. We can be certain that we are in the last days—years and years of them.” I gave him a friendly shake of the hand and sent him on his way. He smiled, seemed more reassured

to put all this in some context, and held his head a little higher as he left me.

I hasten to say that I *do* know what this young man was really asking. What he really meant was “Will I finish my mission? Is there any point in getting an education? Can I hope for a marriage? Do I have a future? Is there any happiness ahead for me?” And I say to you what I said to him, “Yes, certainly—to all those questions.”

As far as the timing of the triumphant, publicly witnessed Second Coming and its earthshaking events, I do not know when that will happen. *No one* knows. The Savior said that even the angels in heaven would not know (see Matthew 24:36).

We should watch for the signs, we should live as faithfully as we possibly can, and we should share the gospel with everyone so that blessings and protections will be available to all. But we must not be paralyzed just because that event and the events surrounding it are ahead of us somewhere. We cannot stop living life. Indeed, we should live life more fully than we have ever lived it. After all,



God expects you not simply to face the future; He expects you to embrace and shape the future—to love it, rejoice in it, and delight in your opportunities.



Above, from top:
Curitiba Brazil Temple
under construction,
December 2006.
Helsinki Finland
Temple, dedicated
on October 22, 2006.
Nauvoo Illinois
Temple, dedicated on
June 27, 2002. Today,
124 temples are
in operation, and
11 more have been
announced or are
under construction.

this is the dispensation of the *fulness* of times.

Have Faith, Not Fear

I have just two things to say to you who are troubled about the future. I say them lovingly and from my heart.

First, we must *never* let fear and the father of fear (Satan himself) divert us from our faith and faithful living. Every person in every era has had to walk by faith into what has *always* been some uncertainty. This is the plan. Just be faithful. God is in charge. He knows your name and He knows your need.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—that is the first principle of the gospel. We must go forward. God expects you to have enough faith, determination, and trust in Him to keep moving, keep living, keep rejoicing. He expects you not simply to face the future; He expects you to embrace and shape the future—to love it, rejoice in it, and delight in your opportunities.

God is eagerly waiting for the chance to answer your prayers and fulfill your dreams, just as He always has. But He can't if you don't pray, and He can't if you don't dream. In short, He can't if you don't believe.

Two Scriptures of Comfort

Here are two scriptures, both directed at those who live in perilous times.

The first is from section 101 of the Doctrine and Covenants. This revelation came as the Saints who were gathered in Missouri were suffering terrible persecution. I suppose, at its worst, this was the most difficult and dangerous time—may I say “terror filled”—that the Church had yet known.

Yet in that frightening time the Lord said to His people:

“Let your hearts be comforted concerning Zion; for all flesh is in mine hands; be still and know that I am God.

“Zion shall not be moved out of her place, notwithstanding her children are scattered.

“They that remain, and are pure in heart, shall return, and come to their inheritances, they and their children, with songs of everlasting joy, to build up the waste places of Zion—

“And all these things that the prophets might be fulfilled” (D&C 101:16–19).

So let your hearts be comforted concerning Zion. And remember the most fundamental definition of Zion we have ever been given: those who are “pure in heart” (D&C 97:21). If you will keep your hearts pure, you and your children and your grandchildren shall sing songs of everlasting joy as you build up Zion—and you shall not be moved out of your place.

The other verse I refer to is from the Savior, spoken to His disciples as He faced His Crucifixion and as they faced fear, disarray, and persecution. In His last collective counsel to them in mortality, He said: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

So, in a world of tribulation, let's remember our faith. Let's recall the *other* promises and prophecies that have been given, all the reassuring ones, and let's live life more fully, with more boldness and courage than at any other time.

Christ has overcome the world and made a path for us. He has said to us in our day: “Gird up your loins and be prepared. Behold, the kingdom is yours, and the enemy shall not overcome” (D&C 38:9).

More than 2,000 years or so ago there was one temple in the Old World and two or three temples in Book of Mormon history, but now temples are multiplying so rapidly we can hardly count them!

Three Prophetic Quotes

That leads to the second point I want to make about the day in which we live. We are making our appearance on the stage of mortality in the greatest dispensation ever given to mankind, and we need to make the most of it.

Here is a favorite quote of mine from the Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44): “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; . . . we are the favored people that God has [chosen] to bring about the Latter-day glory.”¹

Note this similar affirmation from President Wilford Woodruff (1807–98): “The Almighty is with this people. We shall have all the revelations that we will need, if we will do our duty and obey the commandments of God. . . . While I . . . live I want to do my duty. I want the Latter-day

Saints to do their duty. . . . Their responsibility is great and mighty. The eyes of God and all the holy prophets are watching us. This is the great dispensation that has been spoken of ever since the world began. We are gathered together . . . by the power and commandment of God. We are doing the work of God. . . . Let us fill our mission.”²

Lastly, let me share this from President Gordon B. Hinckley, our modern prophet, who currently guides us through the challenging times of our present hour: “We of this generation are the end harvest of all that has gone before. It is not enough to simply be known as a member of this Church. A solemn obligation rests upon us. Let us face it and work at it.

“We must live as true followers of the Christ, with charity toward all, returning good for evil, teaching by example the ways of the Lord, and accomplishing the vast service He has outlined for us.

“May we live worthy of the glorious endowment of light and understanding and eternal truth which has come to us through all the perils of the past. Somehow, among all



who have walked the earth, we have been brought forth in this unique and remarkable season. Be grateful, and above all be faithful.”³

Over a representative period of time, our prophets have focused not on the terror of the times in which they lived and not on the ominous elements of the latter days, in which we are living, but they felt to speak of the opportunity and the blessing and, above all, the responsibility to seize the privileges afforded us in this, the greatest of all dispensations. I love the line from the Prophet Joseph Smith saying that earlier prophets, priests, and kings “have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we live; and . . . have sung and written and prophesied of this our day.” What were they so joyful about? I can assure you they weren’t concentrating on terror and tragedy. President Woodruff’s words were: “The eyes of God and all the holy prophets are watching us. This is the *great dispensation* that has been spoken of ever since the world began.” Let me repeat President Hinckley’s

words: “Through all the perils of the past, [s]omehow, among all who have walked the earth, we have been brought forth in this unique and remarkable season. Be grateful, and above all be faithful.”

I don’t know how all of that makes you feel, but suddenly any undue anxiety about the times in which we live dissipates for me, and I am humbled, spiritually thrilled, and motivated at the opportunity we have been given. God is watching over His world, His Church, His leaders, and He is certainly watching over you. Let’s just make sure we are the “pure in heart” and that we *are* faithful. How blessed you will be. How fortunate your children and grandchildren will be.

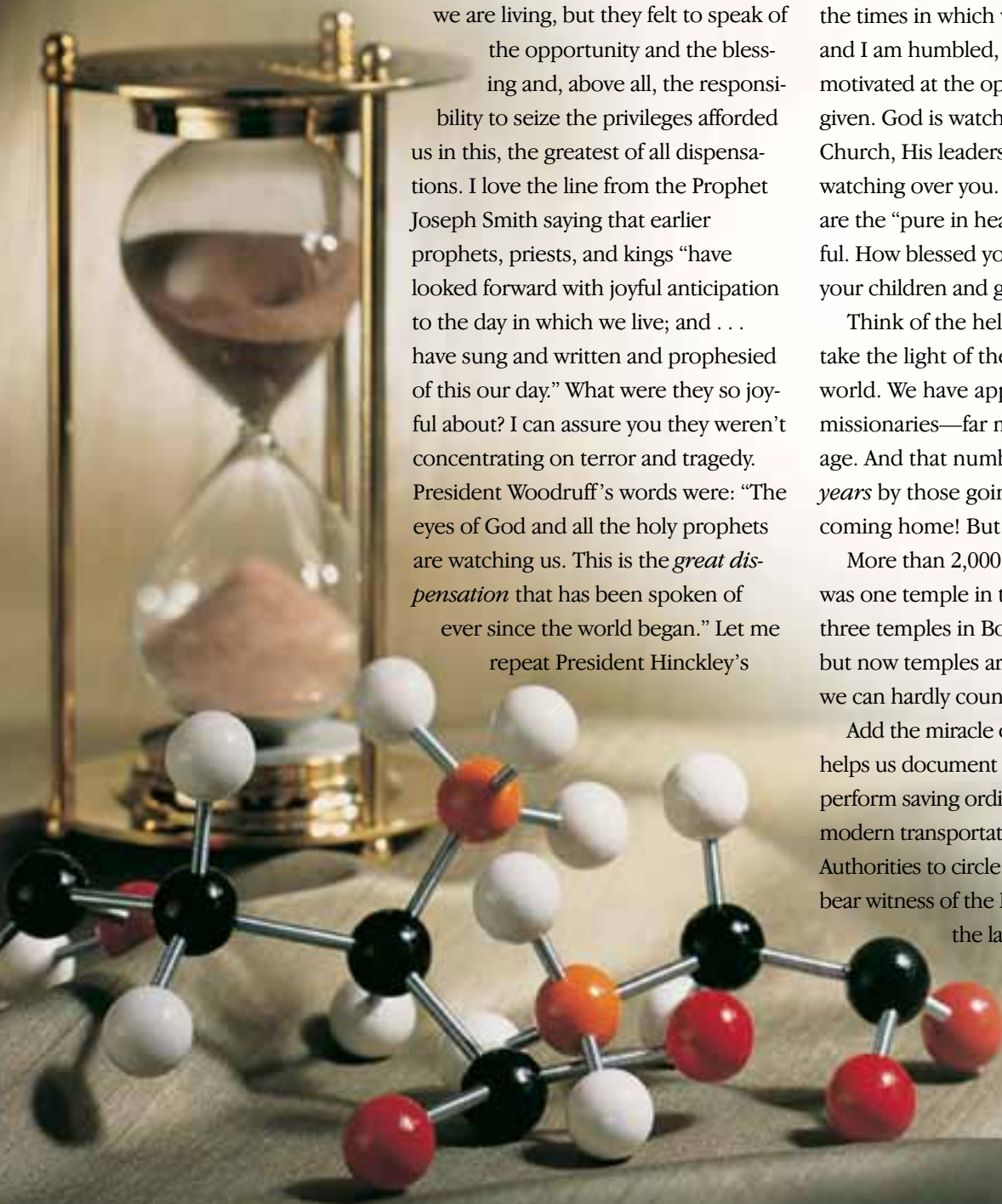
Think of the help we have been given to take the light of the gospel to a darkened world. We have approximately 53,000 missionaries—far more than in any other age. And that number is repeated *every two years* by those going out to replace those coming home! But we need even more.

More than 2,000 years or so ago there was one temple in the Old World and two or three temples in Book of Mormon history, but now temples are multiplying so rapidly we can hardly count them!

Add the miracle of the computer, which helps us document our family histories and perform saving ordinances for our dead. Add modern transportation, which allows General Authorities to circle the globe and personally bear witness of the Lord to all the Saints in all the lands. Add that where we

cannot go we can now “send,” as the scriptures say, with satellite broadcasts (see D&C 84:62).

Add *all* the elements of



education, science, technology, communication, transportation, medicine, nutrition, and revelation that surround us, and we begin to realize what the angel Moroni meant when he said repeatedly to the boy prophet Joseph Smith, quoting the Old Testament prophet Joel, that in the last days God would pour out His Spirit upon “*all flesh*” and that all

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humankind would be blessed by the light coming in all fields of endeavor as part of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Joel 2:28; emphasis added; see also Joseph Smith—History 1:41).

We consider all these blessings that we have in our dispensation, and we pause to say to our Father in Heaven, “How *great* thou art.”⁴

A Wedding Feast

Let me add another element to this view of the dispensation. Because ours is the last and greatest of all dispensations, because all things will eventually culminate and be fulfilled in our era, there is, therefore, one specific responsibility that falls to those of us in the Church now that did not rest quite the same way on Church members in any earlier time. *We have a responsibility to prepare the Church of the Lamb of God to receive the Lamb of God*—in person, in triumphant glory, in His millennial role as Lord of lords and King of kings.

We have the responsibility as a Church and as individual members of that Church to be worthy to have Christ come to us, to

be worthy to have Him greet us, and to have Him accept, receive, and embrace us. The lives we present to Him in that sacred hour *must* be worthy of Him!

In the language of the scriptures we are the ones designated in all of history who must prepare the bride (the Church) for the Bridegroom (the Savior) and be worthy of an invitation to the wedding feast (see Matthew 22:2–14; 25:1–12; D&C 88:92, 96).

So, setting aside fear of the future, I am filled with an overwhelming sense of duty to prepare my life (and to the extent that I can to help prepare the lives of the members of the Church) for that long-prophesied day, for the time when we will make a presentation of the Church to Him whose Church it is.

I do not know when this singular day will come. I do not know who will be present to see it. But this I *do* know: when Christ comes, the members of His Church *must* be looking and acting like members of His Church are *supposed* to look and act if we are to be acceptable to Him. We must be doing His work, and we must be living His teachings. He must recognize us quickly and easily as truly being His disciples.

Surely that is why President Hinckley said: “It is not enough [for us, you and me, *now*, in our time] to simply be known as a member of this Church. . . . We must live as true followers of . . . Christ.” These are the *latter days*, and you and I are to be the best Latter-day *Saints* we can.

Live with Confidence

Is there a happy future for you and your posterity in these latter days? Absolutely! Will there be difficult times when those ominous



Among the knowledge and technology blessing humankind in these latter days are DNA research, computer-assisted family history research, and advanced medical treatments.



To be the best Latter-day Saints we can, we must be doing the Lord's work—building strong families, increasing personal spirituality, and serving others.

latter-day warnings and prophecies are fulfilled? Of course there will. Will those who have built upon the rock of Christ withstand winds, hail, and the mighty shafts in the whirlwind? You know they will. You have it on good word. You have it on His word! That “rock upon which ye are built . . . is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men [and women] build they cannot fall” (Helaman 5:12).

I leave you my love and my testimony that God not only lives, but He loves us. He loves *you*. Everything He does is for our good and our protection. There are evil and sorrow in the world, but there is no evil or harm in Him. He is our Father—a perfect father—and He will help us find refuge from the storm.

I testify not only that Jesus is the Christ, the holy and Only Begotten Son of God, but that He lives, that He loves us, that on the strength and merit of His atoning sacrifice, we too will live eternally.

This is the Church and kingdom of God on earth. Truth has been restored. Live with confidence, optimism, faith, and devotion. Be serious about life's challenges but not frightened or discouraged by them. Feel the joy of the Saints in the latter days—never crippling anxiety or destructive despair.

“Fear not, little flock. . . . Look [to Christ] in every thought; doubt not, fear not” (D&C 6:34, 36).

“Ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath . . . prepared for you. . . . Be of good cheer. . . . The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours” (D&C 78:17–18).

When Christ comes, the members of His Church must be looking and acting like members of His Church are supposed to look and act if we are to be acceptable to Him.

I leave you my blessing, my love, and an apostolic witness of the truthfulness of these things. ■

From a Church Educational System fireside address given on September 12, 2004.

NOTES

1. *History of the Church*, 4:609–10.
2. In James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965–75), 3:258.
3. “The Dawning of a Brighter Day,” *Liabona* and *Ensign*, May 2004, 84.
4. “How Great Thou Art,” *Hymns*, no. 86; emphasis added.

