

Our Father's Plan—Big Enough for All His Children

ELDER QUENTIN L. COOK

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Even though our journey may be fraught with tribulation, the destination is truly glorious.



This mortal life can constitute a difficult journey, but the destination is truly glorious. Christ expressed this to His disciples: “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.”¹

My objective, this afternoon, is twofold: first, to address some stumbling blocks to faith; and second, to describe how our Father’s plan is big enough for all His children.

During the past two years in the

United States and across the world, there has been a dramatic increase in the discussion of our faith and beliefs. This is not new; it has happened periodically throughout the history of the Church.

In 1863 Charles Dickens, the English novelist, went on board the passenger ship *Amazon*, which was bound for New York. His purpose was to report on the Latter-day Saint converts who were emigrating to build up the Church in the American West. There had been thousands of converts who had already emigrated, and much had been written, particularly in the British media, about them and their beliefs. Most of what was written was unfavorable.

“I went on board their ship,” wrote Dickens, “to bear testimony against them if they deserved it, as I fully believed they would; to my great astonishment they did not deserve it.”²

After observing and mingling with the converts, Dickens was impressed with them and described these English converts, most of whom were laborers, as being “in their degree, the pick and flower of England.”³

There have been two contrasting reports with respect to the Church.



On one hand, righteous members and the way they live their lives have generally been reported on favorably. Those who know Latter-day Saints personally or have the opportunity to observe them up close have the same view that Charles Dickens reported almost 150 years ago.

Because of the uplifting doctrine of the Restoration, members rejoice in the gospel and find joy and satisfaction in the Church. We are viewed favorably when we live the teachings of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. When members don't live the teachings, it can be a stumbling block to those who do not belong to the Church.⁴

Unlike the favorable reports on righteous members, descriptions of the Church and its doctrine have often been untrue, unfair, and harsh. It should be acknowledged that some descriptions of Christianity in general have also been very harsh.⁵

This attitude toward our doctrine does not come as a surprise. In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord indicated that there would be some who "lift up their voices and curse God,"⁶ and some "turn their hearts from me because of the precepts of men."⁷

Recent bus ads in London demonstrate the polarization that exists concerning religion in general. Some

atheists, agnostics, and nonbelievers paid to display large posters on red double-decker buses in London that said, "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." Opposing ads by Christians asserted, "There definitely is a God," followed by uplifting messages.⁸

Nonbelievers find it hard to accept the miracles of the Old and New Testaments and the Savior's virgin birth and Resurrection. They view these events with the same skepticism as the appearance of God the Father and Jesus Christ to the Prophet Joseph Smith. They are not open to the possibility of a heavenly



plan presided over by a supreme being. They do not have faith.⁹

My principal concern is for the honorable people on the earth who are open to religious faith but have been discouraged or confused by incorrect doctrine. For instance, with respect to the doctrine that revelation still exists, some very good people have been confident that the Church could not be true because they have been taught, and therefore believe, that the heavens are closed and there will be no additional revelation, no scripture, and no pronouncements from heaven. Let me emphasize that this widely held belief is not scriptural, but it is a stumbling block to some.¹⁰

In a recent best-selling book, the author uses as his principal analogy the interesting fact that for centuries all Europeans believed that all swans were white. It wasn't until the discovery of Australia that swans of a different color were discovered. The author uses this analogy to help explain events which have actually occurred but were not expected.¹¹ As I thought about this analogy, I realized that many people have refused to seriously investigate the Church because they believe there can be no revelation in this dispensation. One convert, who is now serving as a mission president, describes how difficult this was for

him when he was investigating the Church. He said, "I had been taught all my life that there would never again be prophets and apostles here upon the earth. So to accept Joseph Smith as a prophet created a large stumbling block." However, when he prayed, he states, "I received a witness that in fact the gospel had been restored to the earth and that Joseph Smith was truly a prophet of God."¹²

For many of these people who are open to religious faith, one issue has been particularly troubling. They have had a difficult time reconciling the correct doctrine that we have a loving Father in Heaven and the incorrect doctrine that most of mankind would be doomed to eternal hell.

This was an issue with my great-great-grandfather Phineas Wolcott Cook. He was born in 1820 in Connecticut. In his diary he notes that he had made a covenant with the Lord to serve Him if he could find the right way. He attended many churches and at one was asked to "testify [and] join the church [and] be a Christian." His response was he "could not tell which one to join, there were so many." He continued to investigate several churches. One doctrine was of particular significance to him. He explained: "Sometimes they found fault with me because I wanted a more liberal

salvation for the family of man. I could not believe the Lord had made a part to be saved and a great part to be damned to all eternity."¹³ Because of this doctrine, he allowed his name to be taken off the records of one Protestant religion. When the LDS missionaries taught him the true doctrine of the plan of salvation in 1844, he was baptized.

Phineas's faith in the loving mercy of the Lord and His plan of happiness has been shared by many honorable men and women, even when the teachings of their own churches were very bleak.

The Anglican church leader and classical scholar Frederic Farrar, the author of *The Life of Christ*, lamented in lectures in Westminster Abbey that the common teachings of the Protestant churches with respect to hell were incorrect. He asserted that a definition of hell which included endless torment and everlasting damnation was the result of translation errors from Hebrew and Greek to English in the King James Version of the Bible. Farrar also noted the overwhelming demonstration of a loving Father in Heaven throughout the Bible as additional evidence that the definitions of hell and damnation used in the English translation were incorrect.¹⁴

Lord Tennyson in his poem "In Memoriam" expressed his heartfelt sentiment after noting that "we trust that somehow good will be the final goal of ill." He continued:

*That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroy'd,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile
complete.*¹⁵

At the time Joseph Smith received revelations and organized the Church, the vast majority of churches taught that the Savior's Atonement would *not* bring about the salvation of most of mankind. The common precept

was that a few would be saved and the overwhelming majority would be doomed to endless tortures of the most awful and unspeakable intensity.¹⁶ The marvelous doctrine revealed to the Prophet Joseph unveiled to us a plan of salvation that is applicable to all mankind, including those who do not hear of Christ in this life, children who die before the age of accountability, and those who have no understanding.¹⁷

At death, righteous spirits live in a temporary state called paradise. Alma the Younger teaches us “paradise [is] a state of rest, a state of peace, where [the righteous] shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.”¹⁸ The unrighteous spirits dwell in spirit prison, sometimes referred to as hell.¹⁹ It is described as an awful place, a dark place where those fearful of the “indignation of the wrath of God” shall remain until the resurrection.²⁰ However, because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all spirits blessed by birth will ultimately be resurrected, spirit and body reunited, and inherit kingdoms of glory that are superior to our existence here on earth.²¹ The exceptions are confined to those who, like Satan and his angels, willfully rebel against God.²² At the resurrection, the spirit prison or hell will deliver up its captive spirits. Jesus came into the world “to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness.”²³

The Savior said: “Let not your heart be troubled. . . . In my Father’s house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you.”²⁴ A succinct summary is provided in the book of Moses: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”²⁵

After all the Savior has suffered for mankind, it is not surprising that in speaking of existing churches in the

First Vision, He would instruct Joseph to “join none of them, for they were all wrong.”²⁶ The Savior subsequently ushered in the Restoration of His true doctrine with respect to the plan of salvation and other saving principles such as the doctrine of Christ.²⁷

But notwithstanding the significance of our doctrinal differences with other faiths, our attitude toward other churches has been to refrain from criticism. They do much good. They bless mankind. Many help their members learn of the Savior and His teachings.

A reporter for the *Washington Post* visited one of our Church meetings in Nigeria. The reporter interviewed one new member and told of his conversion. The reporter states:

“[He] said . . . he jumped off a city bus and walked into the [LDS Church building]. . . . He immediately liked what he heard inside [the chapel], especially that no one preached that people of other faiths were going to hell.”²⁸ This echoes the feeling of numerous converts to the Church since its organization.

Our leaders have consistently counseled us “to live with respect and appreciation for those not of our faith. There is so great a need for civility and mutual respect among those of differing beliefs and philosophies.”²⁹

It is equally important that we be loving and kind to members of our own faith, regardless of their level of commitment or activity. The Savior has made it clear that we are not to judge each other.³⁰ This is especially true of members of our own families. Our obligation is to love and teach and never give up. The Lord has made salvation “free for all men” but has “commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance.”³¹

The desire of our hearts, of course, is not only to acquire salvation and immortality but also to attain eternal

life with a loving Father in Heaven and our Savior in the celestial kingdom with our families. We can obtain eternal life only through obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.³² The Savior said, “For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me.”³³

Those early European converts that Dickens met on board the ship *Amazon* had overcome many stumbling blocks. They had a testimony that revelation comes from heaven and that prophets and apostles are again on the earth. They had faith in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

They had come to understand the sublime destination that was in store for them. They were not fearful of the arduous journey they were undertaking, and their ultimate destination was not really the Salt Lake Valley. Their true destination was paradise followed by exaltation in the celestial kingdom.

That is why Latter-day Saints then and now sing the last verse of “Come, Come, Ye Saints” with faith and expectation.

*And should we die before our
journey’s through,
Happy day! All is well!
We then are free from toil and
sorrow, too;
With the just we shall dwell!*³⁴

A loving Father has provided a comprehensive and compassionate plan for His children “that saves the living, redeems the dead, rescues the damned, and glorifies all who repent.”³⁵ Even though our journey may be fraught with tribulation, the destination is truly glorious.

I rejoice in the great plan of salvation that is big enough for all of our Father in Heaven’s children. I express gratitude beyond my ability to articulate for the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I bear my witness

of Him in the name of Jesus Christ,
amen. ■

NOTES

1. John 16:33.
2. Charles Dickens, "The Uncommercial Traveler," *All the Year Round*, July 4, 1863, 449; see also David M. W. Pickup, *The Pick and Flower of England* (2001), 2.
3. *All the Year Round*, July 4, 1863, 446.
4. See Alma 4:10.
5. See Paul Johnson, "Militant Atheism and God," *Forbes*, Oct. 8, 2007, 27; John Gray, "Faith in Reason: Secular Fantasies of a Godless Age," *Harper's Magazine*, Jan. 2008, 86.
6. D&C 45:32.
7. D&C 45:29.
8. William Lee Adams, "Christians and Atheists Battle in London Bus Wars," *Time*, Feb. 8, 2009, www.time.com.
9. See Luke 18:8.
10. Some have mistakenly cited Revelation 22:18, but this has reference to the book of Revelation, not the Bible as a whole. See also Deuteronomy 4:2.
11. See Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (2007), xvii–xxviii.
12. Gary G. Ely, May 16, 2008, conversation preparatory to his service as president of the Colorado Denver North Mission.
13. In Newell Cook McMillan, comp., *The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook* (1980), 19–20.
14. See Frederic W. Farrar, *Eternal Hope* (1892), xxxvi–xlii. For an expanded discussion of this topic, see H. Wallace Goddard, "God's Plan—Kinder Than We Dare to Expect," *Meridian Magazine*, www.ldsmag.com/myth/060217plan.html.
15. *Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Henry Frowde (1907), 387–88.
16. See Frederic W. Farrar, *Eternal Hope* (1892), xxii.
17. See D&C 29:46–50; 137:7–10.
18. Alma 40:12.
19. See 2 Nephi 9:10–14; D&C 76:84–86.
20. Alma 40:14.
21. See D&C 76:89.
22. See Isaiah 14:12–15; Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:7–9; D&C 76:32–37.
23. D&C 76:41; see also 1 Corinthians 15:22.
24. John 14:1–2.
25. Moses 1:39.
26. Joseph Smith—History 1:19; see also v. 20.
27. See 2 Nephi 31:2–21; see also Hebrews 6:1–2; 2 John 1:9–10; 3 Nephi 11:30–40.
28. Mary Jordan, "The New Face of Global Mormonism," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 19, 2007, p. A01.
29. Gordon B. Hinckley, "This Is the Work of the Master," *Ensign*, May 1995, 71.
30. See Luke 6:37.
31. 2 Nephi 26:27.
32. See D&C 93:1.
33. D&C 93:20.
34. "Come, Come, Ye Saints," *Hymns*, no. 30.
35. Orson F. Whitney, *Saturday Night Thoughts* (1921), 323.