



# TERROR, TRIUMPH, AND A WEDDING FEAST

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CES Fireside for Young Adults • September 12, 2004 • Brigham Young University

Thank you for coming, even if you did know who the speaker would be. It's a thrill for me to be with you tonight. Where did you all come from? (Don't answer that! We don't have time.) And although I can't see all of you, I am very conscious of the wonderful, much larger satellite audience gathered in so many other locations around the world—some 80,000 or so of you. We welcome all of you, and I thank you for your attendance and your invitation to me to speak.

I want to excuse Sister Holland tonight. She would have dearly loved being with us, but she is in Houston, Texas, tonight, helping with a brand-new granddaughter born to our daughter and son-in-law there. If those of you gathered in Houston turn around slowly and look near the back of the room, you may see a cute little grandmother hiding on the back row pretending to be an institute student. Now I know full well how young she looks, brethren, but please, she is already taken. I appreciate her support there just as much as if she were here at my side tonight. I bring you her love, and only such duty as grandmothers have at such times would keep her from being here with us. "Hermana Holland, te amo."

As many of you know, Sister Holland and I have just returned from a two-year assignment in Chile, where, like so many of you tonight are doing, we sat with young adults and institute students in stake centers half a world away, receiving these broadcasts far from Church headquarters. We too felt the Spirit of the Lord and the love of our leaders. We especially felt the fellowship of thousands around the world, like you, who were the same age, shared the same faith, and wanted the same things for a full and happy future.

I come tonight very mindful of my young friends in Chile but equally mindful of all our other friends around the world—in England and France, in Korea and Japan, in Australia and Nigeria and the Ukraine, to say nothing of the legions of you gathered throughout North America. *Bienvenidos* to all of you, whatever language you speak, and please know that I love you. There is such strength in our numbers. I pray for the

Spirit and blessings of the Lord to be upon all of us and earnestly desire that what I say will be of some value to each of you.

## Terror

I want to speak to you tonight in the context of ongoing anxiety in the world and some of the challenges we face at home and abroad. Of course there have always been challenges in every age and dispensation, but yesterday—September 11—was the third anniversary of a violent and near-unimaginable event that rocked the whole world. Indeed, the aftermath of that act has dramatically and perhaps permanently affected many of the ways in which the world now lives. Perhaps with such an anniversary yesterday, the fears and concerns of our modern times are still in your hearts today.

In any case, certainly our neighbors—the citizens of the nations to which we are beaming this broadcast tonight—have, since September 11, 2001, been dangling off balance, have been made more fearful, and have been alarmed by international events and the almost wholesale new use of the word *terror*. Not many years ago that word was reserved almost entirely for B-grade movie advertisements and Stephen King novels. Now, sadly, it is daily fare in our newspapers and so common in conversation that even young children, including the schoolchildren in Russia, are conscious that the world in which we live can be brutally, criminally affected by people called "terrorists." And there are other disasters of other kinds, natural and otherwise, documented in the news that remind us that life can be fragile, that life can present fateful turns of events.

## The Last Days

Against that backdrop, 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, I had a

missionary ask 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, and I wanted to be reassuring. I thought perhaps an arm around him and some humor could relieve his anxiety a little. Giving him a hug, I said, “Elder, I may not be the brightest person alive, but even I know the name of the Church.” We then talked about being *Latter-day* Saints. 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. So we already have about 184 years of experience seeing the Second Coming and the last days unfold. We can be certain that we are in the last days—years and years of them,” I said, and 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 went on his way. I assume he has long since finished a successful mission and is now happily at home getting on with his life, perhaps even sitting in this audience somewhere looking for a wife! (He’d better be.)

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 all of you what I said three years ago to him: “Yes, certainly—to all those questions.”

As far as the actual timing of the final, publicly witnessed Second Coming itself and its earthshaking events, I do not know when that will happen. Furthermore, President Gordon B. Hinckley has said that *he* doesn’t know when it will happen, and that is because *no one* knows when it will happen. The Savior said that even the angels in heaven would not know (see Matthew 24:36).

We should watch for the signs and read the meaning of the seasons, 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 cannot and must not be paralyzed just because that event and the events surrounding it are out there ahead of us somewhere. We cannot stop living life. Indeed, we should live life more fully than we have ever lived it before. After all, this is the dispensation of the *fulness* of times.

I say this because in recent times—post 9-11 times, I suppose—I have heard very fearful and even dismal opinions coming from some in your age group regarding the questions that missionary had in mind. I have heard some of *you* say that *you* wonder whether there is any purpose in going on a mission or getting an education or planning for a career if the world we live in is going to be so uncertain. I have even heard sweethearts say, “We don’t know whether we should get married in such uncertain times.”

Worst of all, I have heard reports of some newlyweds questioning whether they should bring children into a terror-filled world on the brink of latter-day cataclysms. May I tell you that, in a way, those kinds of attitudes worry me more than Al-Qaeda worries me.

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

First, we must *never*, in *any* age or circumstance, let fear and the father of fear (Satan himself) divert us from our faith and faithful living. There have *always* been questions about the future. Every young person or every young couple in every era has had to walk by faith into what has *always* been some uncertainty—starting with Adam and Eve in those first tremulous steps out of the Garden of Eden. But that is all right. This is the plan. It will be okay. 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, as it says in K. Newell Dayley’s hymn commemorating our pioneers of the past, “with faith in ev’ry footstep.”<sup>1</sup> But like those pioneers, you do have to keep taking them—one step and then another and then the next. That is how tasks are accomplished, that is how goals are achieved, and that is how frontiers are conquered. In more divine language, that is how worlds are created and it is how *your* world will be created.

God expects you to have enough faith and determination and enough trust in Him to keep moving, keep living, keep rejoicing. In fact, He expects you not simply to *face* the future (that sounds pretty grim and stoic); He expects you to embrace and *shape* the future—to love it and rejoice in it and delight in your opportunities.

God is anxiously 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.

Drawing upon my vast background of children's bedtime stories, I say you can pick your poultry. You can either be like Chicken Little and run about shouting "The sky is falling; the sky is falling" or you can be like the Little Red Hen and forge ahead with the productive tasks of living, regardless of who does or doesn't help you or who does or doesn't believe just the way you believe.

So much for farmyard stories! How about two scriptures, both directed at those who live in perilous times?

The first is from section 101 of the Doctrine and Covenants. If you recall, this revelation came as the Saints who were gathered in Missouri were suffering great persecution—were at the very height of their persecution. Mobs had driven them from their homes. Hostility, even hatred, followed them from county to county as they sought refuge. These frightened Saints lost land, livestock, clothing, furniture, crops, and a host of personal possessions. Threats of death were heard every day. I suppose, at its worst, this was the most difficult and dangerous time—may I say "terror-filled"—that the Church had ever known. Later on names like Haun's Mill and Liberty Jail would take their place in our vocabulary forever.

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, my young friends, 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. Talk about troubled times! In His last collective counsel to them in mortality, and knowing full well what lay ahead for Him and for them, 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—and there will always be plenty of it—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 in our history.

Christ has overcome the world and made straight a path for us in the wilderness. 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). So let's gird up. Let's get some gusto into singing those songs of everlasting joy.

## Triumph

That leads directly to the other related point I want to make regarding the day in which you and I live. In times of anxiety we tend to focus pretty much (like my young missionary friend did) on the "Latter-day" part of that title.

But tonight I issue a call to each of you to concentrate on the "Saint" portion of that phrase. That is the element in our Church title that should be demanding our attention. Think of the blessings we enjoy. Think of the remarkable age in which we live. Think of the economic and educational, scientific and spiritual blessings we have that *no other* era or people in the history of the world have ever had, and then consider the responsibility we have to live worthily in our moment in time.

## This Great Dispensation

We are making our appearance on the stage of mortality in the greatest dispensation of the gospel 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: "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.”<sup>2</sup>

Note this similar affirmation from Wilford Woodruff in 1894. Perhaps I do not need to remind you of the staggering challenges President Woodruff faced. Those years here in the West were, I suppose, every bit as fearful in their own way as were the ones I described in Missouri: prophets in seclusion, apostles in prison, fear (in President Woodruff’s words) “that the whole nation” was turning against our people, preparing to “make war upon” the Church.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, President Woodruff said in the midst of such troubles: “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.”<sup>4</sup>

Lastly, let me share this from President Hinckley, our modern prophet, who currently guides us through the challenging times of our present hour. Citing just last April conference that very theme struck by President Woodruff, he said to all of us:

“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.”<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting to me that in those three quotations, 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 all living, but they felt to speak of the opportunity and 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. Brother 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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 and spiritually thrilled, 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 about it. No earlier people down through the gospel ages—including our own parents, in many cases—have had anywhere near the blessings that you and I have been given.

Think of the help we have been given to take the light of the gospel to a darkened world. We have approximately 55,000 missionaries—obviously far more than in any other age in the history of the world since time began. And that number is repeated *every two years* by those going out to replace their predecessors! But we need even more. We have an LDS presence in some 170 countries. We publish our scriptures in more than 100 languages.

Over 6,000 years or so ago there was one temple in the old world (it was rebuilt two or three times, but it was always the same temple on the same mountain: Mount Moriah in Jerusalem) and two or three temples in Book of Mormon history, but now we live in a time when temples are multiplying so rapidly we can hardly keep up. As of a few minutes ago we had 119 active temples with more, I am sure, to be announced and put under construction.

Add the miracle of the computer, which helps us document our family histories and systematically perform saving ordinances for the redemption of our dead. Add modern transportation, which allows the First Presidency, the Twelve, and other General Authorities to circle the globe and personally bear witness of the Lord to all of the Saints in all of the lands. Add that where we cannot go we can now “send,” as the scriptures say, with satellite broadcasts like the one we are using tonight (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 the whole world, all 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; italics 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”<sup>7</sup> and “How *good* Thou art.”

In fact, I have a theory about those earlier dispensations and the leaders, families, and people who lived then, of those whom the Prophet Joseph, President Woodruff, and President Hinckley spoke. I have thought often about them and the destructive circumstances that confronted them. They faced terribly difficult times and, for the most part, did *not* succeed in their dispensations. Apostasy and darkness eventually came to every earlier age in human history. Indeed, the whole point of the Restoration of the gospel in these latter days is that it had *not* been able to survive in earlier times and therefore had to be pursued in one last, triumphant age.

We know the challenges Abraham’s posterity faced (and still do). We know of Moses’s problems with an Israelite people who left Egypt but couldn’t quite get Egypt to leave them. Isaiah was the prophet who saw the loss of the 10 Israelite tribes to the north. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were all prophets of captivity. Peter, James, John, and Paul, the great figures of the New Testament, all saw apostasy creeping into their world almost before the Savior had departed and certainly while they themselves were still living. Think of the prophets of the Book of Mormon, living in a dispensation ending with such painful communication between Mormon

and Moroni about the plight they faced and the nations they loved dissolving into corruption, terror, and chaos.

In short, apostasy and destruction of one kind or another was the ultimate fate of every general dispensation we have ever had down through time. But here’s my theory. My theory is that those great men and women, the leaders in those ages past, were able to keep going, to keep testifying, to keep trying to do their best, not because they knew that *they* would succeed but because they knew that *you* would. I believe they took courage and hope not so much from their own circumstances as from yours—a magnificent congregation of young adults like you tonight gathered by the hundreds of thousands around the world in a determined effort to see the gospel prevail and triumph.

Moroni said once, speaking to those of us who would receive his record in the last days:

“Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you.

“Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:34–35).

One way or another, I think virtually *all* of the prophets and early apostles had their visionary moments of our time—a view that gave them courage in their own less-successful eras. Those early brethren knew an amazing amount about us. Prophets such as Moses, Nephi, and the brother of Jared saw the latter days in tremendously detailed vision. Some of what they saw wasn’t pleasing, but surely all those earlier generations took heart from knowing that there would finally be one dispensation that would not fail.

Ours, not theirs, was the day that gave them “heavenly and joyful anticipations” and caused them to sing and prophesy of victory. Ours is the day, collectively speaking, toward which the prophets have been looking from the beginning of time, and those earlier brethren are over there still cheering us on! In a very real way, *their* chance to consider themselves fully successful depends on *our* faithfulness and *our* victory. I love the idea of going into the battle of the last days representing Alma and Abinadi and what they pled for and representing Peter and Paul and the sacrifices they made. If you can’t get excited about that kind of assignment in the drama of history, you can’t get excited!

## A Wedding Feast

Let me add another element to this view of the dispensation that I think follows automatically. 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 particular, very specific responsibility that falls to those of us in the Church now that did not rest quite the same way on the shoulders of Church members in any earlier time. Unlike the Church in the days of Abraham or Moses, Isaiah or Ezekiel, or even in the New Testament days of James and John, *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*. No other dispensation ever had that duty.

In the language of the scriptures, we are the ones designated in all of history who must prepare the bride for the advent of the Bridegroom and be worthy of an invitation to the wedding feast (see Matthew 25:1–12; 22:2–14; D&C 88:92, 96). Collectively speaking—whether it is in our lifetime or our children’s or our grandchildren’s or whenever—we nevertheless 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 and receive and embrace us. The lives we present to Him in that sacred hour *must* be worthy of Him!

## We Must Be Acceptable to Him

So, setting aside fear of the future or concerns about the dimensions of a backyard bomb shelter, I am filled with awe, 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 that transfer of authority, for the time when we will make a presentation of the Church to Him whose Church it is.

I do know this: When Christ comes, the members of His Church *must* look and act 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. As President J. Reuben Clark Jr. once advised, our faith must *not* be difficult to detect.<sup>8</sup>

Yes, if in that great, final hour we say we are believers, then we had surely better be demonstrating it. The

Shepherd knows His sheep, and we must be known in that great day as His followers in deed as well as in word.

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.”<sup>9</sup>

Yes, my beloved young friends, these are the latter days, and you and I are to be the best Latter-day *Saints* we can. Put an emphasis on the last word there, please.

When will all of this finish? When shall Christ appear publicly, triumphantly, and the Millennium begin? I have already told you that I don’t know. What I do know is that the initial moments of that event began 184 years ago. I do know that as a result of that First Vision and what has followed it, we live in a time of unprecedented blessings—blessings given to us for the purpose of living faithfully and purely so when the Bridegroom finally and triumphantly arrives, He can personally, justifiably bid us to the wedding feast.

Is there a happy future for you and your posterity in these latter days? Absolutely! Most assuredly you have a beautiful future. All wedding feasts are happy occasions. Will there be difficult times when those ominous latter-day warnings and prophecies are fulfilled? Of course there will. There always have been. Be prepared. Will those who have built upon the great rock of Christ withstand such winds, such hail, and the mighty shafts in the whirlwind? You know that 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” (see Helaman 5:12).

My beloved young brothers and sisters, I leave you my love and my testimony that God not only lives, He loves us. He loves *you*. Everything He does is for our good and our protection. There is 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 shelter us 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. He conquered death and hell for us, and He conquered fear in the same way.

This is the Church and kingdom of God on earth. Joseph Smith was a prophet and Gordon B. Hinckley

is a prophet. Truth has been restored. You and I are fortunate enough to have been born when all of this knowledge and all of this safety are available to us.

I leave an apostolic blessing on each one of you individually within the sound of my voice that you will live with confidence, optimism, faith, and devotion. I bless you that you will be serious about life's challenges but not frightened or discouraged. I bless you to feel the joy of the Saints in the latter days—never crippling anxiety or destructive despair. Indeed, the only concern I would have us entertain is a very personal one: How can we live more fully, more faithfully, so that all the blessings of this great dispensation can be showered upon each one of us and upon those whose lives we touch?

“Fear not, little flock. . . . Look [to Christ] in every thought; doubt not, fear not.” “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 6:34, 36; 78:17–18).

I leave you my blessing, my love, and an apostolic witness of the truthfulness of these things in the protective name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. “Faith in Every Footstep,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1997, 15.
2. *History of the Church*, 4:609–10.
3. Wilford Woodruff’s diary, Dec. 31, 1889, cited in James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (1992), 420.
4. 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; see also Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 84–85; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 83.
5. In Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 85; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 84.
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 85; italics added.
7. See “How Great Thou Art,” *Hymns*, no. 86; italics added.
8. See *The Charted Course of the Church in Education*, rev. ed. (1994), 7.
9. In Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 85; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 84.