

Remember and Perish Not

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Of the Seventy

Remembering in the way God intends is a fundamental and saving principle of the gospel.



I feel honored to follow Sister Parkin. Her service and teachings as well as those of her counselors have blessed all of us. About this same hour 18 1/2 years ago, I was standing near this pulpit waiting for the congregational singing to end, when I was to step forward and give my first general conference address. My anxiety at that moment must have been obvious. Elder L. Tom Perry, who was standing behind me, leaned forward and, in his positive and enthusiastic way, whispered in my ear. “Relax,” he said, “we haven’t lost anyone at that pulpit in years!”

Those encouraging words and the few minutes that followed in which I

spoke for the first time to a worldwide audience of Latter-day Saints constitute a treasured memory for me. Like all of you, I am constantly accumulating a reservoir of memories which, when recalled, make up a very useful and often enjoyable part of my consciousness. And, despite resolutions I made as a young man never to weary others with reminiscing when I grew older, I now take great pleasure in sharing my own memories at almost every possible occasion. Today, however, I wish to speak of a more profound role of memory and remembering in the gospel of Jesus Christ than the passive recall and enjoyment of information.

If we pay close attention to the uses of the word *remember* in the holy scriptures, we will recognize that remembering in the way God intends is a fundamental and saving principle of the gospel. This is so because prophetic admonitions to remember are frequently calls to action: to listen, to see, to do, to obey, to repent.¹ When we remember in God’s way, we overcome our human tendency simply to gird for the battle of life and actually engage in the battle itself, doing all in our power to resist temptation and avoid sinning.

King Benjamin called for such active remembering from his people: “And finally, I cannot tell you all

the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them.

“But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not.”²

Realizing the vital role remembering is to play in our lives, what else ought we to remember? In response, assembled as we are today to remember and rededicate this historic Tabernacle, I suggest that the history of the Church of Jesus Christ and its people deserves our remembrance. The scriptures give the Church’s history high priority. In fact, much of scripture is Church history. On the very day the Church was organized, God commanded Joseph Smith, “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you.”³ Joseph acted on this command by appointing Oliver Cowdery, the second elder in the Church and his chief assistant, as the first Church historian. We keep records to help us remember, and a record of



Between sessions, members look at a painting in a visitors’ center on Temple Square.

the Church’s rise and progress has been kept from Oliver Cowdery’s time to the present day. This extraordinary historical record reminds us that God has again opened the heavens and revealed truths that call our generation to action.

Of all that has been collected, preserved, and written by historians over those many years, nothing exemplifies the importance and power of the Church’s history more than Joseph Smith’s simple and honest story of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appearing to him in what our history books now call the First Vision. In words that generations of missionaries have committed to memory and shared with seekers of truth the world over, Joseph describes the miraculous way in which he received an answer to his question posed in prayer of which Church is right:

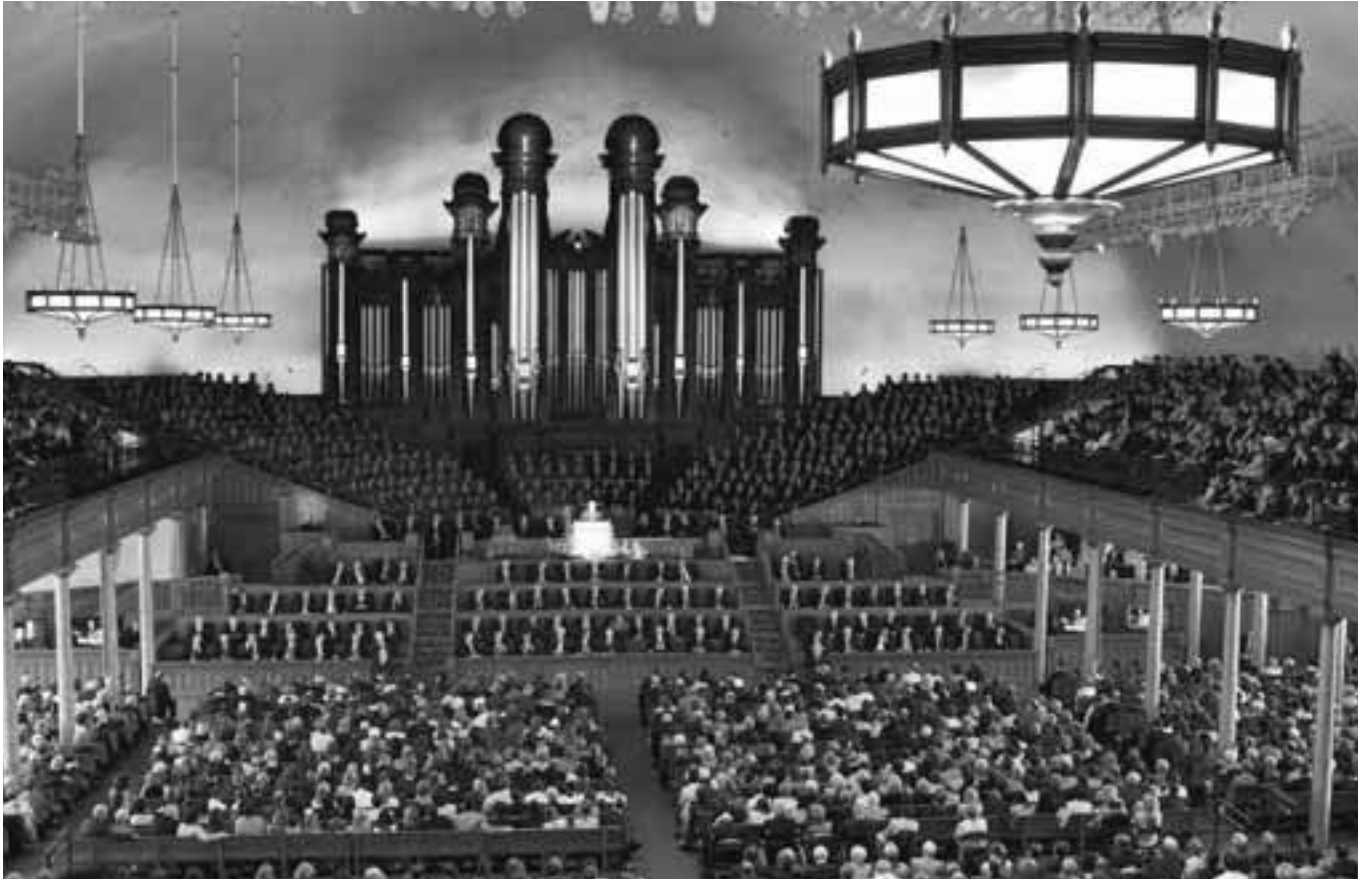
“I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

“. . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*”⁴

Hear him, Joseph did! And millions have heard or read and believed his account and have embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ he helped restore. I believe Joseph Smith and know he was a true prophet of God. Remembering his experience of the First Vision never fails to stir my soul to greater commitment and action.

No one has greater appreciation for the value of the Church’s history than President Gordon B. Hinckley. We love





his delightful sense of humor, but his sense of history is equally keen. Inspiring stories and anecdotes from our past punctuate his writings and sermons. As our living prophet, he consciously emphasizes the past and the future to help us live more righteously in the present. Because of his teachings, we understand that remembering enables us to see God's hand in our past, just as prophecy and faith assure us of God's hand in our future. President Hinckley reminds us how members of the early Church faced their challenges so we, through the grace of God, can more faithfully face our own. By keeping our past alive, he connects us to the people, places, and events that make up our spiritual heritage and, in so doing, motivates us to greater service, faith, and kindness.

In an exemplary way President Hinckley also openly shares from his own personal and family histories. Scores of discouraged new missionaries have been comforted to learn that early in his own mission, President

Hinckley was also discouraged and admitted as much to his father. He even courageously shared his father's brief response: "Dear Gordon, I have your recent letter. I have only one suggestion: forget yourself and go to work."⁵ Over 70 years later, we are all witnesses to how earnestly President Hinckley took that counsel to heart. His sterling character and prophetic wisdom provide persuasive proof for the benefits of remembering the Church's history as well as our own.

There is much more to say about memory and remembering in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We often speak of remembering our sacred covenants and God's commandments and of remembering and performing saving ordinances for our deceased ancestors. Most importantly, we speak of the need to remember our Savior Jesus Christ and not just when convenient, but always, as He asks.⁶ We witness always to remember Him as we partake of the sacrament. In return, we are promised His Spirit will always be

with us. Interestingly, this is the same Spirit sent by our Heavenly Father to "bring all things to [our] remembrance."⁷ Thus, by worthily receiving the sacrament, we are blessed by the Spirit to enter into a wonderfully beneficial circle of remembering, returning again and again in our thinking and devotion to Christ and His Atonement.

Coming unto Christ and being perfected in Him is, I believe, the ultimate purpose of all remembering.⁸ Therefore, I pray that God will bless us always to remember, especially His perfect Son, and perish not. I gratefully testify of Christ's divinity and saving power. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See 2 Nephi 1:12; Mosiah 6:3; Helaman 5:14.
2. Mosiah 4:29–30.
3. D&C 21:1.
4. Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17.
5. In Gordon B. Hinckley, *Faith: The Essence of True Religion* (1989), 115.
6. See 3 Nephi 18:7, 11.
7. John 14:26.
8. See Moroni 10:32–33.