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Preparing for the Lord's Return

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is uniquely empowered and commissioned to accomplish the necessary preparations for the Lord's Second Coming.

In two weeks, we will celebrate Easter. The Resurrection confirms the divinity of Jesus Christ and the reality of God the Father. Our thoughts turn to the Savior, and we ponder “His matchless life and the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice.”¹ I hope we also think about His pending return when “He will rule as King of Kings and . . . Lord of Lords.”²

Some time ago in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I participated in a conference with leaders from a wide variety

of religious faiths. Their love for their fellowman was unmistakable. They were intent on relieving suffering and helping people rise above oppression and poverty. I reflected on the numerous humanitarian undertakings of this Church, including projects in collaboration with a number of the faith groups represented in the conference. I felt deep gratitude for the generosity of the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that makes such Christlike service possible.



In that moment, the Holy Spirit affirmed two things to me. First, the work of ministering to temporal needs is vital and must continue. The second was unexpected, yet powerful and clear. It was this: beyond selfless service, it is supremely important to prepare the world for the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When He comes, oppression and injustice will not only diminish; they will cease:

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. . . .

“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”³

Poverty and suffering will not only decline; they will vanish:

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

“For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”⁴

Even the pain and sorrow of death will be done away:

“In that day an infant shall not die until he is old; and his life shall be as the age of a tree;

“And when he dies he shall not sleep, that is to say in the earth, but shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and shall be caught up, and his rest shall be glorious.”⁵

So yes, let us do all we can to relieve suffering and sorrow now, *and* let us devote ourselves more diligently to the preparations needed for the day when pain and evil are ended altogether, when “Christ [shall] reign personally



upon the earth; and . . . the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.”⁶ It will be a day of redemption and judgment. The former Anglican Bishop of Durham, Dr. N. T. Wright, has aptly described the significance of Christ’s Atonement, Resurrection, and Judgment in overcoming injustice and putting all things right.

He said: “God has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged rightly by a man whom he has appointed—and of this he has given assurance to all by raising this man from the dead. The facts about Jesus of Nazareth, and especially about his resurrection from the dead, are the foundation of the assurance that the world is not random. It is not ultimately a chaos; that when we do justice in the present we are not whistling in the dark, trying to shore up a building that will ultimately collapse, or to fix a car which is actually bound for the scrapheap. When God raised Jesus from the dead, that was the microcosmic event in which the ultimate macrocosmic act of judgment was contained in a nutshell, [the] seed . . . of the ultimate hope. God declared, in the most powerful way imaginable, that Jesus of Nazareth really was the Messiah. . . . In the greatest irony of history, [Jesus] himself underwent cruel and unjust judgment, coming to the place which symbolized and drew together all the myriad

cruelties and injustices of history, to bear that chaos, that darkness, that cruelty, that injustice, in himself, and to exhaust its power.”⁷

While I was at the conference in Buenos Aires that I mentioned earlier, the Spirit made clear to me that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is uniquely empowered and commissioned to accomplish the necessary preparations for the Lord’s Second Coming; indeed, it was restored for that purpose. Can you find anywhere else a people who embrace the present era as the prophesied “dispensation of the fulness of times,” in which God has purposed to “gather together in one all things in Christ”?⁸ If you don’t find here a community intent on accomplishing what needs to be accomplished for both the living and the dead to prepare for that day, if you don’t find here an organization willing to commit vast amounts of time and funds to the gathering and preparation of a covenant people ready to receive the Lord, you won’t find it anywhere.

Speaking to the Church in 1831, the Lord declared:

“The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth. . . .

“Call upon the Lord, that his kingdom may go forth upon the earth, that

the inhabitants thereof may receive it, and be prepared for the days to come, in the which the Son of Man shall come down in heaven, clothed in the brightness of his glory, to meet the kingdom of God which is set up on the earth.”⁹

What can we do to prepare now for that day? We can prepare ourselves as a people; we can gather the Lord’s covenant people; and we can help redeem the promise of salvation “made to the fathers,” our ancestors.¹⁰ All of this must occur in some substantial measure before the Lord comes again.

First, and crucial for the Lord’s return, is the presence on the earth of a people prepared to receive Him at His coming. He has stated that those who remain upon the earth in that day, “from the least [to] the greatest, . . . shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, and shall see eye to eye, and shall lift up their voice, and with the voice together sing this new song, saying: The Lord hath brought again Zion. . . . The Lord hath gathered all things in one. The Lord hath brought down Zion from above. The Lord hath brought up Zion from beneath.”¹¹

In ancient times, God took the righteous city of Zion to Himself.¹² By contrast, in the last days a new Zion will receive the Lord at His return.¹³ Zion is the pure in heart, a people of one heart and one mind, dwelling in righteousness with no poor among them.¹⁴ The Prophet Joseph Smith stated, “We ought to have the building up of Zion as our greatest object.”¹⁵ We build up Zion in our homes, wards, branches, and stakes through unity, godliness, and charity.¹⁶

We must acknowledge that the building up of Zion occurs in tumultuous times—“a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of

weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord.”¹⁷ Thus, the gathering into stakes becomes “for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth.”¹⁸

Just as in former times, we “meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of [our] souls. And . . . to partake of bread and [water], in remembrance of the Lord Jesus.”¹⁹ As President Russell M. Nelson explained in general conference last October, “The long-standing objective of the Church is to assist all members to increase their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and in His Atonement, to assist them in making and keeping their covenants with God, and to strengthen and seal their families.”²⁰ Accordingly, he emphasizes the significance of temple covenants, hallowing the Sabbath, and a daily feasting upon the gospel, centered at home and supported by an integrated study curriculum at church. We want to know about the Lord, and we want to know the Lord.²¹

An underlying effort in building Zion is the gathering of the Lord’s long-dispersed covenant people.²² “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes.”²³ All who will repent, believe on Christ, and be baptized are His covenant people.²⁴ The Lord Himself prophesied that before His return, the gospel would be preached in all the world²⁵ “to recover [His] people, which are of the house of Israel,”²⁶ “and then shall the end come.”²⁷ Jeremiah’s prophecy is being fulfilled:

“Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that [they] shall no more



[say], The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt;

“But, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers.”²⁸

President Nelson has repeatedly emphasized that the “gathering [of Israel] is the most important thing taking place on earth today. Nothing else compares in magnitude, nothing else compares in importance, nothing else compares in majesty. And if you choose to, . . . you can be a big part of it.”²⁹ The Latter-day Saints have always been a missionary people. Hundreds of thousands have responded to mission calls since the beginning of the Restoration; tens of thousands currently serve. And, as Elder Quentin L. Cook has just taught, *all* of us can participate in simple and natural ways, in love, inviting others to join us at church, visit in our homes, become part of our circle. Publication of the Book of Mormon was the signal that the gathering had begun.³⁰ The Book of Mormon itself is the instrument of gathering and conversion.

Also vital to the preparation for the Second Coming is the great redemptive effort on behalf of our ancestors. The Lord promised to send Elijah the prophet before the Second Coming,

“the great and dreadful day of the Lord,”³¹ to “reveal . . . the Priesthood” and “plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers.”³²

Elijah did come as promised. The date was April 3, 1836; the place was the Kirtland Temple. In that place and in that moment, he did indeed confer the promised priesthood, the keys for the redemption of the dead and the union of husbands, wives, and families across all generations of time and throughout all eternity.³³ Without this, the purpose of creation would be frustrated, and in that sense, the earth would be cursed or “utterly wasted.”³⁴

At the youth devotional preceding the dedication of the Rome Italy Temple, the hundreds of young men and women in attendance displayed to President Nelson the cards they had prepared with names of their ancestors. They were ready to enter the temple to perform vicarious baptisms for those ancestors as soon as it opened. It was a supremely gratifying moment, yet but one example of the accelerating effort to establish Zion for the generations that have gone before.

While we strive to be diligent in building up Zion, including our part in the gathering of the Lord’s elect and the redemption of the dead, we should pause to remember that it is the Lord’s work and He is doing it. He is the Lord of the vineyard, and we



are His servants. He bids us labor in the vineyard with our might this “last time,” and He labors with us.³⁵ It would probably be more accurate to say He permits us to labor with Him. As Paul said, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.”³⁶ It is He who is hastening His work in its time.³⁷ Employing our admittedly imperfect efforts—our “small means”—the Lord brings about great things.³⁸

This great and last dispensation is building steadily to its climax—Zion on earth being joined with Zion from above at the Savior’s glorious return. The Church of Jesus Christ is commissioned to prepare—and is preparing—the world for that day. And so, this Easter, let us truly celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and all that it portends: His return to reign for a thousand years of peace, a righteous judgment and perfect justice for all, the immortality of all who ever lived upon this earth, and the promise of eternal life. Christ’s Resurrection is the ultimate assurance that all will be put right. Let us be about building up Zion to hasten that day. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, inside front cover.
2. “The Living Christ.”
3. 2 Nephi 21:6, 9; see also Isaiah 11:6, 9.
4. Revelation 7:16–17.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 101:30–31.
6. Articles of Faith 1:10.
7. N. T. Wright, “Full of the Knowledge of the Lord” (sermon given at matins, Durham, England, Mar. 30, 2016), ntwrightpage.com.
8. Ephesians 1:10.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 65:2, 5.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 2:2.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 84:98–100.
12. The scriptural record states simply, “It came to pass that Zion was not, for God received it up into his own bosom” (Moses 7:69).
13. God declared: “And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men; and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City, that my people may gird up their loins, and be looking forth for the time of my coming; for there shall be my tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion, a New Jerusalem. . . . And for the space of a thousand years the earth shall rest” (Moses 7:62, 64).
14. See Doctrine and Covenants 97:21; Moses 7:18.
15. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 186.
16. See D. Todd Christofferson, “Come to Zion,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 37–40.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 112:24.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 115:6.
19. Moroni 6:5–6; see also Alma 6:5–6; 4 Nephi 1:12.
20. Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Remarks,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 7.
21. See Jeremiah 31:34; John 17:3; Doctrine and Covenants 84:98.
22. One by one, the elect are gathered into the stakes of Zion, “the places of [God’s] appointment” (Doctrine and Covenants 109:39; see also Doctrine and Covenants 124:36).
23. Articles of Faith 1:10.
24. See 2 Nephi 30:2.
25. See Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:31.
26. Doctrine and Covenants 39:11.
27. Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:31.
28. Jeremiah 16:14–15; see also Jeremiah 23:7–8.
29. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org; see also Russell M. Nelson, “Remnants Gathered, Covenants Fulfilled,” in Paul Y. Hoskisson, ed., *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament* (2005), 1–17.
30. See 3 Nephi 21:1–7.
31. Malachi 4:5.
32. Doctrine and Covenants 2:1–2.
33. See Doctrine and Covenants 110.
34. Doctrine and Covenants 2:3; see also Malachi 4:6.
35. See Jacob 5:71–72.
36. 1 Corinthians 3:6.
37. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:73.
38. See 1 Nephi 16:29.