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Preparing for the SECOND COMING

Great men and women in 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.

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.

I love a 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 fired with heavenly and joyful anticipations they have sung and written and prophesied of this our day.”¹ Note this similar affirmation from President Wilford Woodruff: “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.”²

I have a theory about those earlier dispensations and the leaders, families, and people who lived then. 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. Indeed, the whole point of the Restoration of the gospel in these latter days is that the gospel had not been able to survive in earlier times and therefore had to be pursued in one last, triumphant age.

A Dispensation That Will Not Fail

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 people 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!

Preparing Christ's Church for His Coming

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*

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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

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.

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. (1871–1961), former First Counselor in the First Presidency, once advised: our faith must *not* be difficult to detect.³

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.

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 *saints*, please.

When will all of this finish?
When shall Christ appear publicly,



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triumphantly, and the Millennium begin? I don't know. What I do know is that the initial moments of that event began 193 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.

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.

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” (D&C 6:34, 36; 78:17).

I leave you my blessing, my love, and an apostolic witness of the truthfulness of these things, that our dispensation will not fail and that those who live the teachings of Christ and do His work will be worthy of an invitation to the wedding feast when the Bridegroom comes. **NE**

From the Church Educational System fireside “Terror, Triumph, and a Wedding Feast,” given on September 12, 2004. For the full text, go to speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 4:609–10.
2. Wilford Woodruff, 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, “The Dawning of a Brighter Day,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 83.
3. See J. Reuben Clark Jr., *The Charted Course of the Church in Education*, rev. ed. (1994), 7.