

Saturday, April 4

First Day

The noblest concept that can enter the heart of man is the concept that the family unit continues in eternity, and that salvation is a family affair.

In the name of Jesus Christ.
Amen. ○

President Joseph Fielding Smith

The congregation and chorus will stand and sing "O Ye Mountains

High," after which Elder Sterling W. Sill, Assistant to the Twelve, will be our speaker.

The congregation sang the hymn, "O Ye Mountains High."

Elder Sterling W. Sill

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

● In Charles Dickens' great book *The Tale of Two Cities*, he talks about the French revolutionary period of 200 years ago, almost as though he were describing our own day. In establishing the setting for his story, he said:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way. . . ."

A world of contrasts

In our world of contrasts, the hazards frequently become greater as the benefits are increased, and it seems that difficulty is one of the prices that we pay for our blessings. The 12 months lying immediately before us will probably be the greatest period that our world has ever seen. In this coming year more babies will be born than in any other comparable period. More new inventions will be made than ever before. We will learn more new things and have greater material comforts. In the next 12 months more people will go to college, and more people will join the Church of Christ than in any other year. On the other hand, there will probably be more people die than ever before. We may have more

troubles, commit more crimes, use more dope, drink more liquor, indulge in more sins, foster more soul-destroying violence, and send a greater number of ourselves to hell, than ever before.

Dispensation of fulness of times

The apostle Paul spotlighted the greatness of our day when he referred to it as the dispensation of the fulness of times, when God would gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are upon the earth. (See Eph. 1:10.) The ancient prophets eagerly looked forward to our time, and many of them almost lived in our day. They knew about our great knowledge explosion and the unheard-of miracles, wonders, and wealth that it would produce. Jesus himself looked beyond the black night of the dark ages, caused by the apostasy from God in the meridian of time, and he saw our day, when the gospel would be restored in a fullness never before known in the world. And as one of the signs preceding his own glorious second coming to the earth, he said, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." (Matt. 24:14.)

Preparation for millennium

Our generation is living on the approaches of the final cleansing that will prepare the earth for its great

millennium of peace, when Christ shall reign personally upon the earth for a thousand years. The prophet Malachi describes this part of our future when all corruptible things will be consumed. He says, ". . . and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple. . . . But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap." (Mal. 3:1-2.)

The apostle Paul fills in some of the details by saying, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:16-17.)

These great latter-day events are now well on their way toward fulfillment. The gospel is already going forth under divine command. We are now in the midst of the greatest and the last of all of the dispensations. From many points of view we are presently living in the very best of times. The priesthood is again upon the earth. God has given us three great volumes of new scripture, outlining in every detail the simple principles of the gospel of Christ. The pathway to exaltation is now perfectly marked and brilliantly lighted, so that no one need get off that straight and narrow way except by his own choice. For every point of Christian doctrine, there is now an authoritative statement saying, "Thus saith the Lord." The stone that Daniel envisioned being cut out of the mountain without hands is now rolling toward its divine destiny of filling the whole earth.

The best and worst of times

But the best of times is also the worst of times. As Jesus looked forward to our day and contemplated our doings, he made a very uncomplimentary comparison to us by saying, ". . . as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." (Matt. 24:37.) By their wickedness the

antediluvians brought about their own destruction, and many evidences indicate that we are now trembling upon the very brink of a comparable disaster. And yet our day of wonders and enlightenment offers us so much more than any other period since creation. We now have our greatest opportunity to make Christian converts. Now is the best time ever known to make money. And no people have ever had a greater chance to be faithful to God or loyal to the government, nor has anyone ever had a better opportunity to uphold law and order than we now have.

Increased intensity of temptations

However, simultaneously with these advantages, we are now making our greatest indulgences in idleness, disloyalty, confusion, uncleanness, irresponsibility, and indifference to God. The new morality gives us more freedom to indulge our sins, and it also makes our atheism seem more respectable to us.

Our age is noted for the increased number, variety, and intensity of our temptations. Almost everything that we read, hear, or think is likely to have some lurking temptation to draw us downward. But the dictionary says that to tempt is to arouse a desire for, and a desire can go in either direction. However, we frequently forget the temptations upward, while we over-indulge ourselves in the temptations of evil. The temptations downward are the temptations of ignorance, the temptations of crime, the temptations of misery, the temptations of eternal damnation. We are filling our minds with delusions. We picture to ourselves how attractive evil is and how difficult it is to live the religion of being honest, fair, decent, and obedient to God. But no temptation is a temptation, unless we are entertaining it.

Temptations imply desires

In denying our own responsibility, we frequently blame Satan for much of the misery that we are bringing upon ourselves. Satan has no power over us except as we give it to him. And temptations without imply desires

within; and rather than say, "How powerfully the devil tempts," we might say, "How strongly I am inclined." God never forces us to do right, and Satan has no power to force us to do wrong. As someone has said, "God always votes for us and Satan always votes against us, and then we are asked to vote to break the tie." It is how we vote that gives our lives their significance.

Someone has said:

"All the water in the world,
However hard it tried,
Could never sink the smallest ship
Unless it got inside.

And all the evil in the world,
The blackest kind of sin,
Can never hurt you the least bit
Unless you let it in."

The Pacific Ocean may contain more water than the Atlantic Ocean, but it can't sink any ship a bit more easily. And our tremendously increased present-day evils have no more power over us than the ancient temptations had over our fathers, except as we provide them with a more enticing entertainment.

Our temptations upward

Actually, the greatest of all our opportunities is provided by our exciting present-day temptations upward. And inasmuch as we seem to be temptation prone, we might give more thought to the thrilling temptations to culture, the temptations to happiness, the temptations to honor, the temptations to be like God. The temptations up are far more pleasant and much more profitable than the temptations down. We need to take greater advantage of those challenging temptations to be friends with God.

Because of God's new revelations, it is now no longer necessary to repeat

the dark ages' mistakes in Christian doctrines. And in living by every one of God's commandments, we may now more effectively help to bring about our own eternal life. The beast goes down on all fours and thus his vision is cast upon the ground, but man stands upright in the image of his Maker that he may look up to God our Eternal Father. And among the greatest of all our human concepts are the immortality of the human personality and the eternal glory of the human soul. Each of us is a child of God, created in his image and endowed with his attributes and potentialities.

Our inheritance

Each of us should cling to our inheritance. There is everything in knowing our inheritance and constantly reaffirming it in our lives. And certainly we should not claim to be children of God and then go about the world acting as though we are orphans or weaklings or cowards or sinners. By an abundance of our good works, we can have our own finest year this year and make for our world the very best of times. We can also help to usher in the age of belief in God, the age of light, the age of reason, and the age of righteousness, as well as to help bring about a millennium of peace on earth and goodwill toward men. And may God grant that it may be so, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. ○

President Joseph Fielding Smith

We have just heard from Elder Sterling W. Sill, Assistant to the Twelve.

Bishop Victor L. Brown, second counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, will be our next speaker. He will be followed by Elder Loren C. Dunn of the First Council of Seventy.