

## Elder Mark E. Petersen

This anniversary of the Church is of great importance to the Latter-day Saints.

### Measuring Church growth

One reason is that it allows us to see ourselves in perspective. It helps us to measure our growth. It shows us the direction we have come over the last 150 years and now points like a compass to the future.

With the ancient scriptures in our hands and the teachings of modern prophets constantly before us, we chart the course which the Lord expects us to follow.

By restoration from heaven we have received the everlasting gospel brought back to earth by angelic ministration as foretold by the prophets who saw our time. With it we were given the Book of Mormon, which is an amazing volume of ancient American prophetic writing. More than a million copies are published each year as we take it worldwide.

Our missionary system has increased from about a dozen men in 1830 to an army of nearly thirty thousand today. Our membership doubles every fifteen years. Our four million will soon be eight million. Our stakes and missions now exceed thirteen hundred in number in about eighty different nations. We have twelve thousand local congregations in forty-six languages.

We operate hundreds of seminaries and institutes for the daily study of the gospel. We also have some elementary schools and colleges. Our great Brigham Young University is recognized in many lands for its superior accomplishments. Knowing that the glory of both God and man is intelligence, we advocate good education.

We have a welfare program which is the envy of nations. We

make an earnest effort to care for our own with no expense to taxpayers. For this purpose we have hundreds of projects which not only provide the necessities of life for the needy among us, but employment also, including jobs for the handicapped.

Our temple work moves forward magnificently. We are building additional temples in various parts of the world as we take the ordinances of salvation to more and more people. The service rendered in those holy structures exceeds anything ever known in the past.

We take humble pride in the rapid growth, the marvelous accomplishments, and the stability of our people. "By their fruits ye shall know them," the Savior taught (Matt. 7:20). Our fruits bear testimony of our devotion to Almighty God, of our firm commitment to carry on his modern ministry, and of the validity of the message which we bear.

### Our message

And what is our message?

First and foremost, it is that God *does* live, that he is our Eternal Father and our Creator. All human beings are his offspring. Knowing this, we accept the commandment of the Savior to perfect ourselves so that we may be like him.

Next we affirm that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ—he who was born in Bethlehem on the first Christmas; he who answered the questions of the doctors in the temple when but twelve years old; he who was baptized of John; he who walked the plains of Palestine preaching his gospel, healing many who were sick, and raising some of the dead; he who was persecuted by the religious cults of the day, was condemned to the cross, but who conquered death and

the grave in a glorious resurrection on the third day afterward.

He *is* the Savior of mankind! He *is* the Redeemer of all flesh! He *did* arise from the grave. He *is* risen, as the angel said, in physical, corporeal reality. And he lives today! Our modern prophets have seen him face to face and have talked with him. We know that he lives and by his resurrection he will also give to each of us a victory over death, for we too shall be resurrected—physically and literally. We too shall live again. That is our testimony on this Easter day.

We testify also that Christ has spoken again in our day, that he has raised up new prophets and through them has reestablished his Church on earth as it was originally when he called Peter, James, and John, Thomas, Judas, and others into the ministry.

The divine gospel was lost over the centuries, human philosophies displaced revealed doctrine, and the holy priesthood was taken away. But now it is all restored! We testify that it *is* restored! Revelation again comes from heaven. Prophets once more walk among us, and the truth is offered freely to all who will listen. God's modern dispensation now shines as a brilliant ensign to the nations, just as the prophets foretold.

### War between good and evil

But as it shines, opposition grows. As truth is spread abroad, deceit and dishonesty arise to oppose it. As virtue is taught by the servants of God, unchastity increases among the ungodly. Indeed, as the Prophet Lehi said, "There is an opposition in all things" (2 Ne. 2:11); and as truth manifests itself, the adversary seeks to strike it down.

In a very real sense it is a war—a hot war—a war between right and wrong, between the powers of heaven and the forces of Lucifer.

The scriptures warn that the devil will make war with the Saints of God, but he never can and he never will overcome them. He will attack them with all the wicked devices his pornographic mind can devise, but he never will stop God's work.

This is not a war for territory or wealth; it is a contest for the eternal souls of men and women, boys and girls, the literal offspring of God, our Heavenly Father.

Our forces are strong. We have had many glorious victories and will yet have more. Our task is to save all who will listen.

God's work and glory are the same: "To bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). We work together in partnership with him.

### Recognize Satan's tactics

But how many of us realize how serious this conflict is? Do we measure its effect upon our own family circles? Do we understand what the devil is trying to do to us? Do we recognize his evil emissaries for what they are when they openly assail us or when they seek deceitfully to seduce us quietly?

Seduction is his greatest weapon. Do we realize that? I repeat: seduction is the greatest weapon of the devil. It is alluring; it falsely appears to be advantageous and desirable. He would have us think that bitter is sweet, that black is white, that sin is acceptable, that virtue is obsolete, archaic, and prudish.

Because he revels in filth, he would tell us that to be clean is some naive concept of our grandmother's age which does not apply in this enlightened day. He says that evil is good and that standards have been relaxed. "Go your way," he says; "fear no consequences; do your own thing; have fun; express your basest

desires if you wish, and let yourselves go!" That is his philosophy.

Do we recognize it when it is flung at us by our angry foes or when it comes with a soft voice and a disarming smile? Do we truly recognize evil when we see it? Do we really know right from wrong? If we do not, then let us hasten to learn from our Church leaders. They will tell us quickly and plainly.

If we *do* know what is right, have we the courage to stand up for it, to defend virtue, to declare the validity of our faith, to oppose false teachings, and to fight the unpopular battle? Have we the moral stamina to confront any and all opportunities and thus preserve truth, uphold cleanliness, and defend the cause of God?

The time has come when we must take a far more firm and positive stand than ever before. We must identify illicit sex, pornography, filthy speech, and the use of liquor, tobacco, marijuana, and worse drugs as enemies of God and enemies to ourselves.

We must see in all of them the fiery darts of the devil.

### **Who is on the Lord's side?**

We must bolster our spiritual fortifications, raise the shield which God has given us, and wield the sword of righteousness and faith as all God's servants should.

We must ask ourselves anew the potent question: *Who's on the Lord's side? Who?*

And we must understand that:

*Now is the time to show;  
We ask it fearlessly;  
Who's on the Lord's side? Who?  
We wage no common war,  
Cope with no common foe;  
The enemy's awake;  
Who's on the Lord's side? Who? . . .  
Our ensign to the world*

*Is floating proudly now;  
No coward bears our flag;  
Who's on the Lord's side? Who?  
(Hymns, no. 175).*

Have you a precious child? Would you save his soul? Would you fight to protect him from immorality, pornography, liquor, tobacco, and drugs? Do you shield him from evil companions?

How vigorously do you fight? Do you go all out for your child, or don't you love him that much? Would you try as hard to save him from sin as you would to save him from drowning or from fire? If not, why not?

Is not sin our worst enemy? It can destroy both body and spirit. Are we not fighting for eternal life as well as for a peaceful mortal existence?

### **Parental responsibilities**

Some young people are in trouble these days. Hundreds of thousands are not, of course, and are faithful and clean. But those who are casualties need help, and their greatest help should and must come from their own home circles.

Then shall we not as families bend every effort to save our young ones? Shall we not fortify our homes to defend them? Shall not every parent rise to this emergency? Every father must awaken to the responsibility which is his. Every mother must put her priorities where they belong.

Is it too much to ask that parents deliberately and objectively teach their children the gospel truths which alone can save them from the carnage of Satan? Is it too much to ask all parents to live those truths themselves?

Is it too much to set a proper example by our own righteous living?

Is it too much to teach our children that it is better to die in defense of virtue than to lose it?

Is it too much to live the Word of Wisdom ourselves and teach it to our little ones? Is it too much to teach them that violation of the Word of Wisdom can lead them into much worse sin?

Is it too much to be honest ourselves and to teach our children to be honest?

Is it too much to have daily family prayers?

Is it too much to go with our children to our Church meetings and observe a sacred Sabbath?

Is it too much to hold family gatherings in our homes either before or after our chapel services on Sunday and thus further insulate our little ones against the sins of the day?

Is it too much to hold a home evening each Monday and there teach our family the value of a clean life, doing so by recreation as well as by precept?

Is it too much to believe sufficiently in the Lord so that we will accept his word and really obey him?

Is it too much to remember that God has said that if we are not valiant in the testimony of Jesus we shall lose the crown over the kingdom (see D&C 76:78-79)?

Is it too much to keep in mind—and may we never forget—that if we receive the commandments with a doubtful heart and keep them with slothfulness, we shall be condemned (see D&C 58:26-29)?

### **“Put on whole armour of God”**

There is no reward for half-hearted obedience. We must become vigorous and enthusiastic about living

our religion, for God commands that we serve him with *all* our heart, with *all* our might, with *all* our strength, and with the very best of our intelligence.

With him there can be no half-way measures. We must be fully for him or we may be classed with those who are *against* him.

Then what shall we do? Put on the whole armour of God—that is what we are to do:

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

“... Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day. . . .

“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:11, 13, 14, 16-17).

As Paul further said, let us not be “men-pleasers,” but be true servants of God, doing his will from the heart (see Eph. 6:6).

For this I humbly pray in the sacred name of the Lord, Jesus Christ, amen.

### **President Marion G. Romney**

Elder Mark E. Petersen, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just addressed us.

We shall now hear from Elder Bruce R. McConkie, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.