

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Be of good cheer

My brothers and sisters, we are living in a time in which we shall see things both wonderful and awful. There is no way that we can be a part of the last days and have it otherwise. Even so, we are instructed by our Lord and Exemplar, Jesus Christ, to "be of good cheer" (D&C 61:36; 78:18).

Jesus has given that same instruction to others before, when the stressful circumstances in which they found themselves were anything but cheerful. For instance, he told the original Twelve to be of good cheer when, on the surface, there was nothing to be cheerful about. (John 16:33.) The indescribable agonies of Gethsemane were imminent. Judas's betrayal lay immediately ahead. Likewise, Jesus' arrest and arraignment. The Twelve would be scattered like sheep. Jesus' unjust and mocking trial and His terrible scourging were but hours away. The shrill and disappointing cry of the mob—to release Barabbas instead of Jesus—would soon echo in the air. Then would come the final, awful moments on Calvary!

Therefore, how could Jesus expect the Twelve to be of good cheer? Because, the Savior said, "*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33; italics added).

Because Christ had overcome the world, the Atonement was about to be accomplished! Death would be irrevocably defeated! Satan would have failed to stop the unfolding plan of salvation! All mankind would be given—through the grace of God—immortality! Additionally, for those who would earn it, there would be the richness of eternal life! These were among the resplendent realities and the fundamental facts which

justified the Twelve's being of good cheer—not their grim, temporary circumstances! The precious perspectives of the gospel give to us this gospel gladness!

It was the same on another occasion when, of a night, the resurrected Jesus stood by an imprisoned Paul, instructing Paul to be of good cheer. (Acts 23:11.) Once again, the circumstances of the moment included Paul's having been struck publicly on the mouth by order of Ananias. Forty individuals were plotting his death. He faced a trial for sedition. Why, therefore, should he be of good cheer? Because, Jesus announced, though in bad circumstances, Paul would soon take the good news of the gospel to Rome!

Church members in another age were being held hostage until certain prophecies were fulfilled—with their lives being forfeit if those prophecies were not fulfilled precisely on time. They, too, were told by the Lord to be of good cheer. Why? Because, said Jesus, "On the morrow come I into the world" (3 Nephi 1:13). With His birth, the mortal ministry of the Messiah would, at last, be launched!

Trust in God's purposes

Gospel gladness was a part of the Prophet Joseph Smith's attitude. In the fall of 1842, rumors were rife of armed mobs on their way to Nauvoo. His beloved Emma was often ill, and there were concerns she would not recover. Joseph was hunted in the City of Joseph. In this same period, of Joseph's circumstance we learn that upon his return home on one occasion he found "Emma sick . . . delivered of a son, which did not survive its birth" (*History of the Church*, 5:209).

Though in a period of such anguish and affliction, the persecuted

Prophet wrote concerning temple work: "Now, what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A voice of *gladness!* . . . a voice of *gladness* for the living and the dead; *glad tidings of great joy.* . . . Let your hearts *rejoice*, and be exceedingly *glad.*" And "Let the mountains shout for *joy*, and all ye valleys cry aloud." (D&C 128:19, 22, 23; italics added.)

What precious perspective we obtain from the gospel of Jesus Christ concerning things that really matter—against which we measure the disappointments of the day!

In the late 1820s, Brigham Young, as yet untouched by the restored gospel, was a somewhat discouraged young man. He found himself disapproving of much of what he saw in the world and wondering if he had a work yet to do. His loving brother, Phineas, gave Brigham prescient counsel: "Hang on, for I know the Lord is agoing to do some thing for us." (Sermon of Heber C. Kimball in minutes, 8 Jan. 1845, Brigham Young Papers, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.) What then happened is Moses-like history!

Thus we see, brothers and sisters, how we are justified in being of good cheer for ultimate reasons—reasons to be distinguished, however, from proximate circumstances. If our attitude, for instance, toward life depends upon the praise of men, the level of interest rates, the outcome of a particular election or athletic contest—we are too much at the mercy of men and circumstance. Nor should our gratitude for the gift of mortal life depend upon the manner in which we die, for surely none of us will rush eagerly forward to tell Jesus how we died!

Instead, Jesus calls upon us to have a deliberate trust in God's unfolding purposes, not only for all humankind but for us individually.

And we are to be of good cheer in the unfolding process.

The less love, the more fear

We must not underestimate, however, the difficulty of the last days. Joel and Zephaniah both speak of the last days as being "a day of . . . gloominess" (Joel 2:2; Zephaniah 1:15). The coming decades will be times of despair. Why? Because, as Moroni said, despair comes of iniquity. (See Moroni 10:22.) The more iniquity, the more despair. And unless there is widespread repentance, despair will both deepen and spread—except among those who have gospel gladness.

Alas, though we are asked to be peacemakers, we do live in a time when peace has been taken from the earth. (See D&C 1:35.) War has been the almost continuing experience of modern man. There have been 141 wars, large and small, just since the end of World War II in 1945. As the American Civil War was about to begin, the Lord declared there would be a succession of wars poured out upon all nations, resulting in the "death and misery of many souls" (D&C 87:1).

Moreover, that continuum of conflict will culminate in "a full end of all nations" (D&C 87:6). Meanwhile, let mortals, if they choose, put overreliance upon mortal arms. As for us, we shall "put on the whole armour of God"! (Ephesians 6:11.) And in the midst of such affliction, if we are righteous and we die, we die unto Him; and if we live, we live unto Him. (See D&C 42:44.)

Alas, brothers and sisters, we likewise live in a time when the love of many will wax cold. (See D&C 45:27; Matthew 24:12.) Fear will therefore increase. Why? Because when men fear, it is because we are not perfect in love. (See 1 John 4:18; Moroni 8:16.) The less love, the more fear—as well as the more war!

As with Paul, however, we may be perplexed, but we are not in despair. (See 2 Corinthians 4:8.) For if we are prepared spiritually, we need not fear. (See D&C 38:30.)

Trial of faith and patience

Even so, the Lord has made no secret of the fact that He intends to try the faith and the patience of His Saints. (See Mosiah 23:21.) We mortals are so quick to forget the Lord: "And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions . . . they will not remember him" (Helaman 12:3).

However, the Lord knows our bearing capacity, both as to coping and to comprehending, and He will not give us more to bear than we can manage at the moment, though to us it may seem otherwise. (See D&C 50:40; 78:18.) Just as no temptations will come to us from which we cannot escape or which we cannot bear, we will not be given more trials than we can sustain. (See 1 Corinthians 10:13.)

Therefore, given the aforementioned grand and overarching reasons to rejoice, can we not "be of good cheer" in spite of stress and circumstance?

President Brigham Young said of a geographical destination, "This is the place." Of God's plan of salvation, with its developmental destination, it can be said, "This is the process"!

Believing participation without full understanding

President Young, who knew something about trial and tribulation but also of man's high destiny, said that the Lord lets us pass through these experiences that we might become true friends of God. By developing our individual capacities, wisely exercising our agency, and trusting God—including when we

feel forsaken and alone—then we can, said President Young, learn to be "righteous in the dark." (Secretary's Journal, 28 Jan. 1857.) The gospel glow we see radiating from some—amid dark difficulties—comes from illuminated individuals who are "of good cheer"!

To be cheerful when others are in despair, to keep the faith when others falter, to be true even when we feel forsaken—all of these are deeply desired outcomes during the deliberate, divine tutorials which God gives to us—because He loves us. (See Mosiah 3:19.) These learning experiences must not be misread as divine indifference. Instead, such tutorials are a part of the divine unfolding.

Even as believers, however, when we are a part of encapsulating events, we can scarcely savor all that swirls about us. It is unlikely, for instance, on that night so long ago in Bethlehem, that Joseph and Mary looked at the newly born Christ child's feet with the realization that those feet would, one day, walk the length and breadth of the Holy Land. And, further, that, later on, spikes would pierce those feet.

As a loving Mary grasped those tiny hands, and, as in the months ahead those tiny hands clasped her, did she know that those hands, when grown, would ordain the original Twelve or, still later, carry the rough-hewn cross?

As she heard her Baby cry, did she hear intimations of Jesus' later weeping at the death of Lazarus or after blessing the Nephite children? (See John 11:35; 3 Nephi 17:21-22.) Did she foresee that those baby-soft knees would later be hardened by so much prayer, including those glorious but awful hours in Gethsemane? (See Matthew 26:36-56.)

As she bathed that Babe so many times to cleanse His pores, could she have been expected to

foresee that one day, years later, drops of blood would come from His every pore? (See Mosiah 3:7.)

There is such a thing as cheerful, believing participation—even without full understanding—when you and I keep certain things in our hearts and are nourished as we ponder them! (See Luke 2:29.)

Maintain right perspective

In the midst of our afflictions, reassurances will come to us from the Lord and from His prophets—as they did to the Lord's people in another age when they feared an approaching army, and the prophet reminded and reassured them, and "therefore they hushed their fears" (Mosiah 23:28). Like a young Eliza Snow in an ox wagon in the midst of tribulation, we can maintain our perspective about "things as they really are" and, in her words, be "thankful that we are so well off." (Jacob 4:13; Kenneth W. Godfrey, *Women's Voices*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1982, p. 147.) Such reassurances and perspective will surely be needed, brothers and sisters, for the Lord has clearly indicated that His purifying and sifting judgment would begin *first* at the house of God and then proceed outward to the world. (See 1 Peter 4:17; D&C 112:25.) Just what this sifting will consist of is not now clear, what special pressures—combined with the ongoing and demanding rigors of "taking up the cross daily"—we know not. (See Luke 9:23.) We do know that the tempter's triad of tools, identified by Jesus as temptation, persecution, and tribulation, will be relentlessly used. (See Matthew 13:21; Luke 8:13.)

And if the heat from the sun of such circumstances will scorch even a green tree, this heat will be very real. (See Luke 23:31; D&C 135:6; Alma 32:38.)

Much sifting will occur because

of lapses in righteous behavior which go unrepented of. A few will give up instead of holding out to the end. A few will be deceived by defectors. Likewise, others will be offended, for sufficient unto each dispensation are the stumbling blocks thereof! A few will stumble because, in their preoccupation with the cares of the world, they do not have oil in their lamps. And, again and again, those who refuse to eat their spiritual spinach will come off second when they wrestle with the world. Some, because of the scorn of the world, will grow ashamed and let go of the iron rod. (See 1 Nephi 8:28.) A few who have not been Saints, but merely tourists passing through, will depart from the path. A few, failing to be of good cheer, will even charge God foolishly. (See Job 1:22.)

Surely, brothers and sisters, already too many Church members have broken hearts and broken homes because of broken covenants and broken promises. Society's increasing slide toward pleasure seeking brings our so-called civilization comparatively closer to Sodom than to Eden.

Forerunner of eternal riches

In our striving to be prepared, therefore, let us be careful to rely on parents, priesthood, and principles—and on scriptures, and temples, and leaders who lead—to see us through. Let us not mistake program scaffolding for substance.

If we are of good cheer, we will find no use for nostalgia for another time, even though a wistful lamentation such as this one is understandable:

"Oh, that I could have had my days in the days when my father Nephi first came out of the land of Jerusalem, . . . then were his people easy to be entreated, firm to keep the commandments of God, and slow to be led to do iniquity. . . .

"But behold, I am consigned that these are my days." (Helaman 7:7, 9.)

Brothers and sisters, these are our days. This is *our time* on earth! These are *our tasks* to be done!

And in these days, being of good cheer is part of being valiant in the testimony of Jesus. (See D&C 76:79; D&C 121:29.)

Finally, in those moments when we feel the pain which is a necessary part of the plan of happiness, we can remember that there was an ancient time when that plan was first unveiled. Then the perceptive among us voted not secretly, but audibly—by shouting for joy! (See Job 38:7.) Let us not go back on those feelings now—for we saw more clearly then what we are experiencing now!

May God help us to be of good

cheer, for this is the forerunner feeling which precedes that glorious condition when our joy will be full! (See D&C 93:34.)

Meanwhile, He who knows the path perfectly has promised, "Be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours . . . and the riches of eternity." (D&C 78:18.)

In the name of Him who waits "with open arms to receive" us—Jesus Christ, amen. (Mormon 6:17.)

President Hinckley

Elder Neal A. Maxwell, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us.

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder Robert E. Wells, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

Elder Robert E. Wells

Another testament of Christ

This is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We are Christians. We know additional details about the Savior's role in the premortal existence before we came here: we have new information about His part in the creation of the world under the direction of our Father; we can identify Him as Jehovah of the Old Testament, communicating with the prophets of Israel. We have the Book of Mormon, which is another testament of Jesus Christ, which has great illuminating doctrines and information about the Savior. Our modern prophets have given revealed explanations, doctrines, light, and knowledge on the Christ as the Redeemer to whom we look for the remission of our sins. We have a wealth of information of tremendous value to all Christian churches. We do not diminish or tear down the faith others have in Christ, but seek

only to share with them our additional knowledge of the Lamb, the Shepherd, the Holy One of Israel (see Psalm 71:22)—for their benefit and salvation.

Like Nephi of old, "we believe in Christ, we . . . look forward with steadfastness unto Christ. . . . We are made alive in Christ because of our faith. . . . We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ. . . . We . . . look forward unto that life which is in Christ." (2 Nephi 25:24–27.) Can anyone doubt that we are Christians in the full sense of the word?

We are Christians

Some time ago, I was on an airplane over the Columbian jungle of South America. I had been telling my seat companion about the Church. At one point in my enthusiastic gospel conversation, my friend commented, "You Mormons