

Gauge perfecting of Saints by love

We must be more diligent and effective as we pursue a steady course in instructing and perfecting the lives of our own people. We must hold to first principles. We must prioritize our teachings to emphasize that which is of the greatest worth.

"Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

"Master, which is the great commandment in the law?"

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

"This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:35-40).

This must be the foundation of our instruction: love of God and love for and service to others—neighbors, family, and all with whom we have association. That which we teach must be constantly gauged against these two standards established by the Lord. If we shall do so, this work will continue to roll forward. We shall become as a city set upon a hill whose light cannot be hid. (See Matthew 5:14.)

He slumbers not, nor sleeps

Then, in a spirit of love and consecration, we must extend ourselves in the work of redemption of the dead through service in the temples of the

Lord. This service more nearly approaches the divine work of the Son of God, who gave his life for others, than does any other work of which I know.

My brothers and sisters, if we will pursue a steady course in carrying out this great triad of responsibility, then we shall be participants with our Father in Heaven in the accomplishment of his eternal purposes. You and I may fail as individuals and miss the blessing. But his work cannot fail. There will always be those he will raise up to accomplish it. He has declared: "Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" (Isaiah 14:24).

I bear witness to you this morning that he, watching over Israel, slumbers not nor sleeps. God help us to be faithful to the great trust he has placed in us, I humbly pray as I invoke the blessings of the Lord upon you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The Tabernacle Choir sang "God of Power, God of Right" without announcement.

President Benson

President Gordon B. Hinckley, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has just addressed us, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "God of Power, God of Right."

We shall now be pleased to listen to Elder Neal A. Maxwell, a member of the Council of Twelve Apostles. Following Elder Maxwell's address, the Choir and congregation will join in singing "Hope of Israel."

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Hopelessness—a modern problem

For many years now—in literature, film, and music—we have wit-

nessed increasing expressions of a profound sense of what has come to be called existential despair, a hopelessness beyond hope. Granted, the

human scene also includes many individuals who go happily about life's labors untouched by these feelings. But the holocausts and the wars have taken their terrible toll of hope among twentieth-century man. Said one eminent scientist, "The most poignant problem of modern life is probably man's feeling that life has lost its significance, . . . [a] view . . . no longer limited to the philosophical or literary *avant garde*. It is spreading to all social and economic groups and affects all manifestations of life" (Rene Dubos, *So Human an Animal* [New York: Scribners, 1968], pp. 14-15).

One need not question either the reluctance or the sincerity with which some despairing individuals have come to such wrong conclusions. In fact, one feels compassion and desires to reach out to them in genuine entreaty!

One recent television drama, in its closing scene in a cemetery, conveyed well this confusion and purposelessness, as one character lamented poignantly:

"Are all men's lives . . . broken, tumultuous, agonized and unromantic, punctuated by screams, imbecilities, agonies and death? Who knows? . . . I don't know. . . . Why can't people have what they want? The things were all there to content everybody, yet everybody got the wrong thing. I don't know. It's beyond me. It's all a darkness" ("The Good Soldier," a dramatization of the novel by Ford Madox Ford).

Lamentations, revelations, fears, and reassurances

But such poignancy of view is no guarantee of the accuracy of the view. Moreover, in human affairs, erroneous and unchallenged assertions sometimes assume an undeserved aura of truth. While a response to this hopelessness may not create conviction in disbelievers, it can bolster believers against the silent erosion of their own convictions.

Besides, as an ancient prophet correctly observed, sadness and badness are mutually reinforcing, for "despair cometh because of iniquity" (Moroni 10:22).

Let us, therefore, place several such lamentations beside the revelations of God. The expressions of despair beside the divine annunciations of hope. The fears of extinction alongside the reassurances of the Resurrection. The provincialism beside the universalism of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then we shall see how myopic some mortals are, like absorbed children in a tree house pretending they are brave and alone!

The lamentations: Man lives in "an unsponsored universe," a universe "without a master," which "cares nothing for [man's] hopes and fears," an "empire of chance" in which man falls victim to "the trampling march of unconscious power" (Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* [London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1950], p. 57).

The revelations: "God himself that formed the earth . . . created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited" (Isaiah 45:18).

"For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (Psalm 95:7).

"For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

"Men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25).

"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." (See Matthew 10:29-30.)

Not only are the hairs of our heads numbered, but the planets also: "But only an account of this earth, and the inhabitants thereof, give I unto you. For behold, there are many worlds that have passed away by the word of my power. And there are many that now stand, and innumerable are they unto man; but all things are numbered unto

me, for they are mine and I know them" (Moses 1:35).

The fears: Mankind is destined to extinction . . . there is nothing we can do. We have no personal life beyond the grave; there is no God. "Fate knows nor wrath nor ruth" (James Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night and Other Poems* [London: Bertram Dobell, 1899], pp. 29–30, 35–36).

The reassurances: "And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

"And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many" (Matthew 27:52–53; see also 3 Nephi 23:9–11).

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

"O how great the plan of our God!" (2 Nephi 9:13).

Immortality and accountability are intertwined

Some despair who are, as Peter said, willingly ignorant (see 2 Peter 3:5) or, as Nephi said, who will not search or understand great knowledge (see 2 Nephi 32:7). For these, a pessimistic philosophy is "pleasing unto the carnal mind" (Alma 30:53). Why? Because behavioral permissiveness flourishes amid a sense of hopelessness. Because if human appetites are mistakenly viewed as the only authentic reality and "now" as the only moment which matters, why should one check-rein any impulse or defer any gratification? Hence, immortality and accountability are intertwined!

Yes, there are some who live without hope who, though having reached such a wrong conclusion, nevertheless maintain right conduct. In such decent individuals, the light of Christ, though unacknowledged, burns still. (See D&C 84:46.) If it were not so, we would despise a Gandhi and admire a Hitler, instead of feeling just the opposite!

Such spreading pessimism does not necessarily mean "back to the catacombs" for Christians, or that secular Caesars will soon reopen the Colosseum. But, already, there are would-be Caesars who will refuse to settle for citizens who render to Caesar only that which is his—and unto God all that is His. (See Matthew 22:21.)

This sense of despair is further intensified by the demonstrated emptiness of materialism. Increased goods will not suffice if men display decreased goodness. Likewise, the mere accumulation of knowledge without purpose and of information without wisdom constitutes ever learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth. (See 2 Timothy 3:7.)

Afflicted with anguish, some wander to and fro upon the earth in search of truth without knowing where to find it. (See Amos 8:11–12; D&C 123:12.) One such prominent wanderer was described by a colleague: "It is strange how he persists . . . in wandering to-and-fro. . . . He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief" (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 20 Nov. 1856 in *English Notebooks*, ed. Randall Stewart [New York: MLA], pp. 432–33).

Life is a test

Such is the scene, therefore, of which we are a part. Many reject the scriptures, the moral memory of mankind, and then declare absolutely the absence of absolutes. Others reject the light of the gospel and then grump over the growing darkness. Still others cut themselves off from God and lament the loneliness of the universe. Some pursue the paths of him who openly desires mankind's misery (see 2 Nephi 2:27), and then bemoan their discontent.

The true Christian, of course, does not see life as an easy passage: "The cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is a Monday morning!" (C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B.

Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965], p. 14). With ultimate hope, however, we can live cheerfully amid proximate insecurity. Life is a test in which man must overcome by faith, walking on the strait and narrow path—which is surely no escalator—but the path is there!

And death is not the permanent annihilation of the human personality and individuality! President Brigham Young wisely declared that the preservation of human intelligence and individuality through the Atonement and resurrection “is the greatest gift that ever was bestowed on mankind” (*Journal of Discourses*, 5:53).

Custodians of a gospel of hope

Just as in translating, the Prophet Joseph Smith processed truths more profound than even he then knew—we are custodians and possessors of a gospel of bright and realistic hope. It is a hope for which many hunger more deeply than we can possibly imagine. We poorly serve the cause of the Lord, at times, with programmatic superficiality and by our lack of empathy for those who drift in despair.

Truly, we live and walk on “a streetful of splendid strangers,” whom we are to love and serve even if they are uninterested in us!

Therefore, seen through the eye of faith, the sweep of history is not evidence of a purposeless world. Instead, we see successive waves of humans, as the cast on this mortal stage changes, again and again.

And, however articulate some of those despairing actors are in this human drama, without the gospel light they view only a tiny portion of one scene, not even a whole act. And certainly not the whole play. Such are invited to understand the purposes and instructions of the Author of this drama. But when He finally “comes on the stage, the play is over!”

“And we will prove them herewith”

Meanwhile, we should not impute man’s failures to God! “Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men” (D&C 3:3).

Indeed, man’s successes and failures were known from the beginning by the Lord and were taken into account by Him in the unfolding of His plan of salvation. (See 1 Nephi 9:6.) His purposes will be fully achieved.

Justice, love, mercy, and truth will finally prevail in a universe presided over by a Lord who is a determined as well as a loving Tutor. This mortal school is one of which the Father and the Son have solemnly declared, “And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:25).

The Lord knows how true individual development requires a setting of agency and opportunity. There is no other way.

“Shine as lights in the world”

No wonder Apostles and prophets have told us not to be moved away from the hope of the gospel, for hope is “an anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6:19) to “make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works” (Ether 12:4; see also Colossians 1:23).

The need, therefore, is for devoted disciples to do as Paul said, to “shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15), illuminating that latter-day valley foreseen by Joel: “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision” (Joel 3:14; see also Revelation 16:16; Zechariah 14:2).

The very way in which these illuminated individuals “take up [the] cross daily” is a sermon in itself. (See Luke 9:23.) They lead lives not of quiet desperation but of quiet inspiration, constituting what Paul would call

their "defence and confirmation of the gospel" (Philippians 1:7).

Theirs represents a tinier and quieter history within the larger and noisier human history, a joyful and reassuring drama within the more despairing drama being played out on this planet.

The first scene: A mission president is called on very short notice to replace a mission president who has died. The faithful wife, in one case, brings her husband's body home, while the other sister, just out of surgery, willingly responds to the call to join her husband far from home. Each sister handles her stern challenge trustingly, sweetly, and without murmuring. They understand that sin is the only real tragedy!

A second snapshot: A young mission president, his wife, and five children in spartan circumstances. Water must be boiled and placed in their van as they drive for hours under a scorching sun to be with scattered missionaries and Saints. Adopted children from another culture are now in a home which is developing a celestial culture, where the mother is the children's only school teacher. Uncomplainingly, this family goes effectively about their labors—quite innocent of how special they are! They know they are included in this reassuring declaration: "all flesh is in mine hands; be still and know that I am God" (D&C 101:16).

Next, in Germany a serviceman solicitously rounds up his military friends in his van to go to a special Young Adult conference. One friend cannot be found in time, and this special serviceman left some of his meager and precious savings for an airplane ticket so that individual could then fly to the needed nourishment of that conference. Intrinsicly, this benefactor follows the second great commandment and rejects the despairing declaration that "hell is other people."

Another portrait is of a youthful disciple, a woman gymnast paralyzed because of a tumble. She fell not into

paralysis but into saintliness. She becomes a witness in a wheelchair. How tall she stands, and how much she stretches the souls of others! Her deprivation is like an excavation, the readying of a reservoir into which a generous God, one day, will pour the Malachi measure of compensatory blessings, "that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10).

Another montage: Widows and widowers, waiting patiently and trustingly for the time of their release, when they can rejoin their eternal companions. Meanwhile, they go about their duties. Like Alma and Paul, they have learned to be content in their allotted circumstances. (See Alma 29:3, 6; Philippians 4:11.)

Likewise, one deeply admires those wronged who, nevertheless, go on doing that which is right, refusing to become offended or bitter. Let others charge God foolishly (see Job 1:22); these faithful souls are magnanimous and forgiving, as was a generous Joseph in Egypt to his erring brothers: "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:6). Such Saints fashion forgiveness where others would revel in resentment!

One is humbled by the spiritual submissiveness of the dying young mother of twenty-six, understandably anguished at the prospect of not rearing her two children, one of whom she so recently made ready to lay down her life for, if necessary. The baby arrived safely, but, alas, the gallant mother could not tarry. With childlike faith this young sister touchingly inquired, "If I am to die, then how can I help my husband and my parents as they watch me die?" Surely she (and others similarly situated) faithfully conforms to King Benjamin's portrait of a Saint as one being "willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19).

Let others falter

Such individuals give to us a continuing sermon in sainthood. The gospel light has "infused such joy" into their souls, that any cloud of darkness has been dispelled (Alma 19:6).

"By the patience of hope and the labor of love" these are finishing the work the Lord has given them to do. (See "Come, Let Us Anew," *Hymns*, no. 17.)

Let the winds and the storms beat and pound upon such faithful Saints; they will overcome the world—not vice versa. Let others falter; these will not! Let others pout and doubt; these will not! Let some noisily mock the temple; these will quietly flock to the temple, to do the work of Him whose house it is!

God bless you faithful brothers and sisters for shining "as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15), as beacons to dispel despair. To a world spiritually illiterate, you give great lessons in the

grammar of the gospel, including this one: death is a mere comma, not an exclamation point!

In the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The Choir and congregation sang "Hope of Israel."

President Benson

We welcome those who have just joined us on radio and television. We are gathered in the Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, in the first session of the 153rd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Elder David B. Haight, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will now address us. He will be followed by Elder Howard W. Hunter, also a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder David B. Haight

Boyhood memories

I wish everyone could grow up in a small town. I have so many happy memories of my boyhood. During those delightful summer and winter evenings we created most of our own activities and amusement. They were wonderful days.

The most important building in our town in addition to the schoolhouse was our ward meetinghouse. The chapel had an imposing, two-tiered, elevated stand. The stand was quite large, and the first raised portion had a table for the ward clerk at one end and a piano at the other end, and right in the center of this elevated area was the sacrament table. On the highest level of the stand was the pulpit with its red plush cover and beautifully carved chairs with red plush seats for the bish-

opric or visiting authorities. On the rear wall of the chapel were two impressive oil paintings, one of the Kirtland Temple and the other of the Salt Lake Temple. Everyone in attendance had a clear view of the stately pulpit and, of course, the sacrament table.

Sacrament meetings were special

Sacrament meetings were very special occasions. The Lord instructed that "it is expedient that the church meet together often to partake of bread and wine in the remembrance of the Lord Jesus" (D&C 20:75). We of the Aaronic Priesthood knew it was special. We were well trained. We knew exactly what we should do. We had been taught at home and in our quorum meetings of the high honor placed on