

Need Thee Every Hour," following which Elder Russell M. Nelson, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will address us.

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The choir and congregation sang "I Need Thee Every Hour."

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## Elder Russell M. Nelson

### Poor and needy always with us

Since my previous medical work took Sister Nelson and me to a number of developing nations, we have been exposed to many challenging scenes. In one country, so many people were sleeping in the streets and on sidewalks that we literally had to step over them as we walked. In another nation, our compassion was stretched almost to the breaking point as we yearned to help countless people in need. Young mothers with babies bundled on their backs begged for money while paddling their little sampan boats, which served both as their shelter and as their mode of transportation. And, oh, how our hearts ached for young men and women of another country who, one by one, were strapped as beasts of burden to wooden-wheeled carts heavily laden with weighty cargo. As far as our eyes could see, the endless caravan of vehicles continued, pulled by dint of human toil.

Although reasons vary according to time and place, the poor and the needy have nearly always been present. Regardless of cause, our Heavenly Father is concerned for them. They are all his children. He loves and cares for them.

### Old Testament: Blessings to those who care for the poor

Lessons from the Old Testament remind us that when the Lord sent prophets to call Israel back from apostasy, in almost every instance, one of the first charges made was that the poor had been neglected.

Scriptures teach us that the poor—especially widows, orphans, and strangers—have long been the concern

of God and the godly. The poor have been especially favored by the law. Old Testament teachings authorized poor persons at harvest time to glean after the reapers. At fruit-picking time, what was left hanging on branches belonged to the poor. In the sabbatical seventh year, and in the jubilee fiftieth year, land was not planted nor tilled, and what grew of itself was free for the hungry.

To those who cared for the poor, blessings were promised. The Lord would deliver them in time of trouble. (See Psalm 41:1.) Truths were taught by these proverbs: "He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he" (Proverbs 14:21). "The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it" (Proverbs 29:7).

### New Testament: A binding obligation to care for the poor

During the Savior's earthly ministry, he reemphasized his timeless concern for the poor. Remember the reply the Lord gave to the question of the rich man: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell [all] that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (Matthew 19:21; see also Luke 18:22).

In one of the Master's precious parables, he illustrated this doctrine with the story of one who was hungry and was given meat, another who was thirsty and was given drink, and a stranger who was welcomed. The Lord related those as favors to him when he taught, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

And when they were *not* ministered unto, he admonished, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it *not* to one of the least of these, ye did it *not* to me" (Matthew 25:45; italics added).

Indeed, the Church in New Testament times also had a binding obligation to care for the poor. (See also Luke 14:12-14, 16:19-31; Acts 2:44-45, 4:32, 6:1-6, 11:27-30; Romans 15:26; Galatians 2:10; James 2:1-9.)

### **Book of Mormon: Obligation for poor**

The Book of Mormon repeatedly declares this doctrine. From it we learn that care of the poor is an obligation that we take upon ourselves at the time of baptism. The prophet Alma so taught:

"Ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;

"Yea, and [ye] are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, . . . even until death. . . .

"Serve him and keep his commandments" (Mosiah 18:8-10).

Every person so baptized who receives the gift of the Holy Ghost, which seals the ordinance, is under solemn covenant with the Lord to obey his commandments. *Caring for the poor is one of those commandments.* Surely, in Book of Mormon times, members of the Church had a sacred obligation to care for the poor. (See 2 Nephi 9:30; Mosiah 4:16-27; Alma 1:29-31, 32:2-6, 34:28; Helaman 4:11-12; Mormon 8:35-39.)

### **Doctrine and Covenants: Relief to the poor and needy**

Few, if any, of the Lord's instructions are stated more often, or given greater emphasis, than the commandment to care for the poor and the needy. Our dispensation is no exception.

In December 1830, the very year in which The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized, the Lord declared that "the poor and the meek shall have the gospel preached unto them, and they shall be looking forth for the time of my coming, for it is nigh at hand" (D&C 35:15).

Bishops were designated and their duties defined: "They shall look to the poor and the needy, and administer to their relief that they shall not suffer" (D&C 38:35).

In 1831, the Lord said: "Remember the poor. . . . Inasmuch as ye impart of your substance unto the poor, ye will do it unto me" (D&C 42:30-31). A little later, he again declared, "Visit the poor and the needy and administer to their relief" (D&C 44:6). Later the same year, he warned: "Wo unto you rich men, that will not give your substance to the poor, for your riches will canker your souls" (D&C 56:16).

### **"In mine own way"**

With these teachings throbbing in our ears, stated and restated in accounts to all people in all days of recorded scripture, let our thoughts return to the homeless, beggars in boats, human beasts of burden, and to multitudes stricken with poverty.

Is it possible to be faithful to our solemn obligation to care for the poor and needy, to lift them and to love them—worldwide?

Where shall we begin?

When?

How?

Hear the answer of Almighty God:

"I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine.

"And it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine.

"But it must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low.

"For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves.

"Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment" (D&C 104:14-18).

### The Lord's prescription

I repeat the Lord's prescription: "But it must needs be done *in mine own way*"! We begin where we are, now, and work according to his plan. His "own way" includes these principles:

"Women have claim on their husbands for their maintenance. . . . [And] all children have claim upon their parents. . . . And after that, they have claim upon the church, or . . . upon the Lord's storehouse, if their parents have not. . . . And the storehouse shall be kept by the consecrations of the church; and widows and orphans shall be provided for, as also the poor" (D&C 83:2, 4-6).

An important part of the Lord's storehouse is maintained as a year's supply, stored, where possible, in the homes of faithful families of the Church.

Now, some may ask, "What about those who are poor because they are idle and unwilling to work?" They should heed these words of warning:

"Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer" (D&C 42:42).

"Wo unto you poor men . . . who will not labor with your own hands!" (D&C 56:17).

Judgment of worthiness is made by the bishop, and ultimately by the Lord, as taught by Nephi: "With righteousness shall the Lord God judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth" (2 Nephi 30:9).

Ours is not to judge; ours is a covenantal obligation to care for the poor and the needy, to prepare for their rejoicing when the Messiah shall come again. (See D&C 56:18-19.)

### Reliance on self, then family, then the Church

The Lord's "own way" includes, first, reliance on self, then on the family. As parents care for their children, they, in turn, may reciprocate when parents become less able. Family pride promotes solicitude for each member, taking priority over other assistance.

If one's family can't help, the Lord's "own way" includes the Church organization. The bishop is assisted by priesthood quorums and good sisters of the Relief Society, organized to look "to the wants of the poor, searching after objects of charity and . . . administering to their wants" (*Handbook of the Relief Society*, 1931, pp. 22).

Members of priesthood quorums and groups have a duty to rehabilitate, spiritually and temporally, their erring or unfortunate brethren. While a bishop extends aid to one temporarily out of work, the quorum arranges for his employment until fully self-supporting again.

As individual members of the Church, you and I participate in the Lord's "own way." At least once a month, we fast and pray and contribute generous offerings to funds that enable bishops to disperse aid. This is part of the law of the gospel. Each of us truly can help the poor and the needy, now, and wherever they are. And we, too, will be blessed and protected from apostasy by so doing.

### "We have so much!"

Limitations do exist. Measures of relief are at best temporary. Storehouses can provide only for some temporal needs. All people cannot be

brought to the same living standards. And all needed things cannot be achieved by goods or gold.

To care fully for the poor, we must help the poor to change. As they are taught and abide doctrines of Deity, spiritual strength will come that enlightens the mind and liberates the soul from the yoke of bondage. When people of the earth accept the gospel of Christ, their attitudes change. Their understanding and capabilities increase.

A poet sensed the great power of the Spirit of the Lord to lift an individual when he wrote:

The chief of all thy wondrous  
works,  
Supreme of all thy plan;  
Thou hast put an upward reach  
Within the heart of man.  
(Author unknown)

That upward reach, drawn from a knowledge of divine doctrines, transforms souls! May I share an illustration with you? Once, Sister Nelson and I were invited to the humble home of Polynesian Saints who had relatively recently joined the Church. By walking carefully on wooden planks, we approached their house, built on wooden piles emerging from the floor of the sea. We climbed a ladder to enter their little one-room dwelling. As we were invited to be seated on freshly woven grass mats, we could peek through holes in the floor and view sea water below. That home was starkly devoid of furniture, except for a used sewing machine provided by sisters of the Relief Society. But the love and warmth of this special family were apparent as our visit continued.

"We would like to sing for you," the father said through an interpreter. He put one arm about his wife and the other about the children, as did his wife. Five little ones, dressed in newly sewn clothing, joined their parents in singing songs the father had composed.

Concluding, he said: "These songs express our feelings of deep gratitude. Before we joined the

Church, we had so little. Now we have so much!"

While wiping tears from our moistened cheeks, Sister Nelson and I looked at each other, comprehending that the gospel brings spiritual wealth which may bear little relation, at first, to tangible abundance. Conversely, people with plenty can be spiritually poor. Yet the Lord is concerned for them all!

### In the Lord's "own way"

Missionary work throughout the world is part of his plan. It brings the light of the gospel to those who embrace the truth. Then, as Saints learn and obey the commandments of God, they will prosper. This promise has been recorded by prophets throughout time and in diverse places. (See Joshua 1:7; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Chronicles 24:20, 31:21; Ezra 6:14; 1 Nephi 2:20, 4:14; 2 Nephi 1:9, 20, 4:4; Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:7, 2:22, 31; Alma 9:13, 36:1, 30, 37:13, 38:1, 48:15, 25.)

Working with a will, Saints gain a new appreciation of who they are and of their eternal worth. Righteousness, independence, thrift, industry, and self-reliance become personal goals. These qualities transform lives. In time, in the Lord's "own way," the poor will no longer be poor.

The Church of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth. The power of God is among men. Angelic ministrants communicate to legal administrators once again. A living prophet, the everlasting priesthood, covenant people, and the Lord's "own way" are upon the earth to bless mankind, all races, in every clime—yes, all people, young and old, wealthy and poor, now and forever more. This I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Monson

Elder Russell M. Nelson, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us. Prior to