

begging for a remission of [our] sins" through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ? (Mosiah 4:19–20).

### **7. The welfare plan builds a Zion people**

Zion is characterized in scripture as a city in which the people "were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them" (Moses 7:18). Zion is "every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God" (D&C 82:19). This promised Zion always seems to be a little beyond our reach. We need to understand that as much virtue can be gained in progressing toward Zion as in dwelling there. It is a process as well as a destination. We approach or withdraw from Zion through the manner in which we conduct our daily dealings, how we live within our families, whether we pay an honest tithe and generous fast offering, how we seize opportunities to serve and do so diligently. Many are perfected upon the road to Zion who will never see the city in mortality.

So, my brothers and sisters, when we think of welfare, let us think of the plan revealed by our Lord for the eternal welfare of our souls. It is a plan to build faith, love, compassion, self-reliance, and unity. When adapted to local needs throughout the world by vigorous priesthood leaders, the plan sanctifies both givers and receivers and prepares a Zion people.

With these basic welfare principles in mind, today we are being

asked to teach and practice the doctrine of work, self-reliance, provident living, giving, and caring for the poor; to increase our generous fast-offering donations to help those in need; to increase our compassionate service, involving the family in charitable acts of service to one another and to our neighbors.

I bear you my testimony that we live in a dispensation of time when there have been ministering angels. The angel Moroni was one such heavenly messenger. His visit was essential to the restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith. But, Joseph Fielding Smith taught us that "it is contrary to the law of God for the heavens to be opened and messengers to come to do anything for man that man can do for himself" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols., comp. Bruce R. McConkie [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–57], 1:196).

That you and I might realize that we have the power and responsibility to help those in need, as ministering angels for the Lord Jesus Christ, that we will be loved because we love, be consoled because we are compassionate, be forgiven because we have demonstrated the capacity to forgive, is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **President Monson**

Thank you, Bishop Robert D. Hales, Presiding Bishop of the Church.

Elder L. Tom Perry, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will now be our concluding speaker.

## **Elder L. Tom Perry**

### **Good and difficult times**

The great lessons of the scriptures teach us over and over again how foolish it is for mankind to desert the ways of the Lord and rely on the arm of flesh. One of the certainties of life is that

mankind, individually and collectively, will cycle through their mortal experience with periods of good and difficult times. How many of our family histories contain paragraphs similar to this?

"Economically, our family had its ups and downs. Like many Americans, we did well during the 1920s. My father started making lots of money in real estate, in addition to his other businesses. For a few years we were actually wealthy. But then came the Depression.

"No one who's lived through it can ever forget. My father lost all his money, and we almost lost our house. I remember asking my sister, who was a couple of years older, whether we'd have to move out and how we'd find somewhere else to live. I was only six or seven at the time, but the anxiety I felt about the future is still vivid in my mind. Bad times are indelible—they stay with you forever" (Lee Iacocca and William Novak, *Iacocca: An Autobiography* [New York: Bantam Books, 1984], p. 7).

But as surely as we can rely on change being a part of life, there is also the absolute assurance that we are children of an eternal Father in Heaven. As the supreme example of a kind and loving father, He has charted a well-defined course for His children to follow, the destination of which is the blessing of returning to His presence.

### The law of the fast

He has marked the path with true principles, which will stand the test of time. In this session of general conference this afternoon, we have been reviewing welfare principles as they have been revealed to us for our application over the last fifty years.

There is one additional principle basic to this whole welfare plan which I would like to discuss with you this afternoon. It is the law of the fast. I always marvel as I study the principles the Lord has designed for us to follow—how simple they are in concept, how easy they are to administer, and how compliance always brings forth additional blessings.

The law of the fast is basic in the Church. Isaiah declared:

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? . . .

"Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry?" (Isaiah 58:6-7).

Like many other biblical practices, it was restored by the Lord in our day through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

The law of the fast has three great purposes. First, it provides assistance to the needy through the contribution of fast offerings, consisting of the value of meals from which we abstain. Second, a fast is beneficial to us physically. Third, it is to increase humility and spirituality on the part of each individual.

### First purpose: Contributions to assist needy

An important reason for fasting is to contribute the amount saved from the meals not eaten to care for the poor and the needy. One of the strongest admonitions the Lord has given to His children on earth is that we have the responsibility and obligation of caring for those in need. It was King Benjamin who said in his great address, "And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants" (Mosiah 4:26).

Do we need to be reminded that included in our baptismal covenant is our pledge to bear one another's burdens that they may be light, to mourn with those that mourn, and to comfort those that stand in need of comfort? (See Mosiah 18:8-9.)

### The Lord's system

The longer I live, the more impressed I am with the Lord's system of

caring for the poor and needy. Surely no man would think of such a simple yet profound way of satisfying human needs—to grow spiritually and temporally through periodic fasting and then donating the amount saved from refraining from partaking of those meals to the bishop to be used to administer to the needs of the poor, the ill, the down-trodden, who need help and support to make their way through life.

It was President [J. Reuben] Clark who said: "The fundamental principle of all Church relief work is that it must be carried on by fast offerings and other voluntary donations and contributions. This is the order established by the Lord. Tithing is not primarily designed for that purpose and must not be used except in the last extremity" (quoted in Marion G. Romney, "Our Primary Purpose," address delivered in Welfare Agricultural Meeting, 3 Apr. 1971, p. 1).

Throughout religious history we have found how the Lord blesses the people when they reach out and care for the poor and the needy. Of the days of Hezekiah we read this in the scriptures:

"And concerning the children of Israel and Judah, . . . they also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of holy things which were consecrated unto the Lord their God, and laid them by heaps.

"And when Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed the Lord, and his people Israel.

"Then Hezekiah questioned with the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps" (2 Chronicles 31:6, 8-9).

The answer was, "Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the Lord hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store" (2 Chronicles 31:10).

We have said a lot today about President Romney and what he has declared about the welfare program. Could I add another statement:

"I am thoroughly in harmony with what the Bishop said about our need to

contribute liberally to the fast-offerings fund and to every other fund that the Church officially calls upon us to contribute to. I am a firm believer that you cannot give to the Church and to the building up of the kingdom of God and be any poorer financially. I remember a long time ago, over 50 years, when Brother [Melvin J.] Ballard laid his hands on my head and set me apart to go on a mission. He said in that prayer of blessing that a person could not give a crust to the Lord without receiving a loaf in return. That's been my experience. If the members of the Church would double their fast-offering contributions, the spirituality in the Church would double. We need to keep that in mind and be liberal in our contributions" (Welfare Agricultural Meeting, 3 Apr. 1971, p. 1).

With all these promises of the Lord over the expanse of man's sojourn on earth, how shocking it is to find that sometimes it is necessary to use tithing funds of the Church to make up for deficits in our fast-offering contributions. Oh, where is our faith? Oh, how we deprive ourselves of the blessings of the Lord by not being generous in our fast-offering contributions.

Let us have the faith to bind the Lord to bless this people because we are following His order to care for the poor and the needy among us by being generous in our fast-offering contributions.

### **Second purpose: Fasting beneficial to us physically**

Fasting is also beneficial to us physically. Some time ago I read an article in *Science News* written by Charles L. Goodrich, which stated that the advantages of modern eating habits extend far beyond the cosmetic. Numerous animal studies have demonstrated that caloric restriction early in life leads to an increased life span and reduces the risk of certain diseases.

There is also evidence of health-promoting effects of periodic fasting. Some experiments have shown that periodic fasting not only promotes a lon-

ger life, but encourages a more vigorous activity later in life. (See *Science News*, 1 Dec. 1979, p. 375.)

Fasting is also one of the finest ways of developing our own discipline and self-control. Plato said, "The first and the best victory is to conquer self; to be conquered by self is, of all things, the most shameful and vile" (*Laws*, Book 1, section 626E).

Fasting helps to teach us self-mastery. It helps us to gain the discipline we need to have control over ourselves.

Again we can conclude that if we are wise in following the Lord's law of the fast, we too will receive benefits, physically.

### **Third purpose: Increase humility and spirituality**

Finally, let us examine the humility and spiritual strength derived from fasting. The Savior certainly recognized the need for this principle, for after His baptism we find the scriptures recording:

"And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,

"Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered" (Luke 4:1-2).

And the devil used all his cunning ways to tempt the Savior to abandon His mission. To this the Savior responded: "Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

"And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.

"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about" (Luke 4:8, 13-14).

Fasting had blessed Him with the power of the Spirit.

There is also the account in the Book of Mormon of Alma as he trav-

eled southward on his way to Manti. He was astonished to meet his friends, the sons of Mosiah, journeying toward the land of Zarahemla. It was a joyous meeting as they exchanged accounts of their missionary journeys. Alma was delighted to see how the sons of Mosiah had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth. The scripture records:

"But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God.

"And they had been teaching the word of God for the space of fourteen years among the Lamanites, having had much success in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth; yea, by the power of their words many were brought before the altar of God, to call on his name and confess their sins before him" (Alma 17:3-4).

These are only two examples of the many we can find in the scriptures where fasting and prayer for a purpose bring forth a special spiritual power. This same blessing is available to each of us if we will only take advantage of it.

### **Testimony of this inspired program**

I would like to add my testimony this afternoon to the others who have given witness to the blessings of those who have given to and received from this great, inspired welfare services program over the last fifty years. My father was the bishop of our ward at the time of its announcement to the Church in April general conference of 1936. The world was struggling in the Great Depression. So many of the fathers of our ward were unemployed. In those days a dime for admission to a school activity would prevent many of my friends from attending because their parents could not afford even that small amount for their children's enjoyment.

Because of my father's calling as a bishop, I was able to gain an apprecia-

tion of the welfare program from its very beginning as I watched him administer to the needs of the poor in his ward with great love and tenderness. How often I raced home from school anticipating a planned activity. As I would round the corner of our home, there I would see sacks of flour, sugar, and other commodities. My heart would fall, as I knew it would be another evening out with Father as he delivered these commodities to those in need. The planned activity would have to be cancelled for that evening.

When he arrived home, I was always enlisted to help him put the commodities in the car and travel with him to make the deliveries. Sometimes I would grumble under my breath for having been so put upon, but then I would have the remarkable experience of watching the light come back into the eyes of a depressed family as food was brought into their home. I always returned home from those experiences with an exhilarated feeling of watching the Church in action as it was caring for its poor and its needy through fast offerings and good, kind priesthood leaders.

May the Lord continue to bless us with the faith to follow the inspired leadership He has provided for us here on earth that we may fulfill our obligations and responsibilities and be blessed by His hand, both spiritually and temporally, as we follow His plan, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## President Monson

Elder L. Tom Perry, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has been our concluding speaker. As you may have guessed, all of the speakers this afternoon are members of the Welfare Executive Committee of the Church. As the chairman of that committee I am very proud of them.

We remind the brethren of the general priesthood meeting which will convene here at the Tabernacle this evening at 6:00 P.M.

The nationwide CBS Radio Tabernacle Choir broadcast tomorrow morning will be from 9:30 to 10:00 A.M. Those desiring to attend this broadcast must be in their seats no later than 9:15 A.M.

The singing for this session has been furnished by the combined institute choir from Utah Technical College, LDS Business College, University of Utah, Weber State College, and Utah State University. We are grateful for the presence of these young people and for the inspiration their music has added to this meeting.

The choir will now sing in closing "I Know That My Redeemer Lives." Following the singing, the benediction will be offered by Elder Devere Harris, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

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The choir sang "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."

Elder Devere Harris offered the benediction.

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## GENERAL PRIESTHOOD MEETING

### THIRD SESSION

The general priesthood meeting convened in the Tabernacle at 6:00 P.M. on Saturday, April 5, 1986.

President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted.

The music for this session was provided by a returned missionary choir from Brigham Young University