

as did the Apostle Paul and the prophets of ancient America. And surely those prophets knew and taught that "charity is the pure love of Christ" (Moroni 7:47). We are left to wonder if the enemies of Christ deliberately removed from the holy writings these saving truths as part of the plain and precious teachings that Nephi prophetically said would be removed (see 1 Nephi 13:20–29). Also, charity is only partially explained in the New Testament. But thankfully the Book of Mormon, another witness for Christ, has restored to us an understanding of this eternal precept. I testify that as we abide by this precept, we will draw nearer to God. Indeed, we will become more like him.

Individually and collectively, we can experience the peace and happiness enjoyed for nearly two hundred years anciently when "there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people" (4 Nephi 1:15). This I know, as I know the Savior lives, in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Monson

We have just listened to Elders Merrill J. Bateman and C. Max Caldwell of the Seventy.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will now address us.

## Elder M. Russell Ballard

### "See that ye be not troubled"

Living in these difficult times, brothers and sisters, requires each one of us to maintain a positive, hopeful perspective about the future. Today, more so than in the past, I am asked about the signs of the times and if I think the end of the world is near. My answer is the same one that Jesus gave some two thousand years ago:

"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is" (Mark 13:32–33).

When Jesus was asked about the sign of His coming, he said:

"Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: *see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass*, but the end is not yet.

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

"All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:6–8; italics added).

### Acceleration of worldwide calamity

Although the prophecies tell us that these things are to take place, more and more people are expressing great alarm at what appears to be an acceleration of worldwide calamity. As members of the Church, we must not forget the Savior's admonition: "Be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass." These are difficult times, when the forces of nature seem to be unleashing a flood of "famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places."

Recently I read a newspaper article that cited statistics from the U.S. Geological Survey indicating that earthquakes around the world are increasing in frequency and intensity. According to the article, only two major earthquakes (earthquakes measuring at least six on the Richter scale) occurred during the 1920s. In the 1930s the number increased to five, and then it decreased

to four during the 1940s. But in the 1950s, nine major earthquakes occurred, followed by fifteen during the 1960s, forty-six during the 1970s, and fifty-two during the 1980s. Already almost as many major earthquakes have occurred during the 1990s as during the entire decade of the 1980s.

The world is experiencing violent disorders, both physical and social. Here in the United States we are still reeling from two incredibly destructive hurricanes. People in the Philippines see no end to the devastation of the volcanic eruption of Mount Pinatubo. Famine grips portions of Africa, where tragic human suffering is prevalent. To a lesser degree, hunger afflicts millions, even in countries that have a high standard of living.

Political unrest, warfare, and economic chaos prevail in many parts of the world, and the plagues of pornography, drug misuse, immorality, AIDS, and child abuse become more oppressive with each passing day. The media busily satisfies an apparently insatiable appetite of audiences to witness murder, violence, nudity, sex, and profanity. Is not this the day of which Moroni spoke when he recorded: "Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing" (Mormon 8:35). And then he prophesied of conditions of the world as they are today.

### **We must never give up hope**

Brothers and sisters, whether or not these are indeed the last days or even "the beginning of sorrows" as the Savior foretold, some of us may find our lives laden with frustration, disappointment, and sorrow. Many feel helpless to deal with the chaos that seems to prevail in the world. Others anguish over family members who are being carried downstream in a swift, raging current of weakening values and

declining moral standards. Children particularly are suffering as society drifts further and further away from the commandments of God.

Many have even resigned themselves to accept the wickedness and cruelty of the world as being irreparable. They have given up hope. They have decided to quit trying to make the world a better place in which they and their families can live. They have surrendered to despair.

Admittedly we have ample reason to be deeply concerned because we see no immediate answers to the seemingly unsolvable problems confronting the human family. But regardless of this dark picture, which will ultimately get worse, we must never allow ourselves to give up hope! Moroni, having seen our day, counseled, "Wherefore, there must be faith; and if there must be faith there must also be hope" (Moroni 10:20).

### **The Lord is in control**

To all who have harbored feelings of despair and an absence of hope, I offer the words of the Lord through the Prophet Joseph Smith:

"Fear not, little flock; do good; let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail. . . .

"Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not" (D&C 6:34, 36). "Even so am I in the midst of you" (D&C 6:32).

My message to you today, my brothers and sisters, is simply this: the Lord is in control. He knows the end from the beginning. He has given us adequate instruction that, if followed, will see us safely through any crisis. His purposes will be fulfilled, and someday we will understand the eternal reasons for all of these events. Therefore, today we must be careful not to overreact, nor should we be caught up in extreme

preparations; but what we must do is keep the commandments of God and never lose hope!

### Turn to Christ for hope and safety

But where do we find hope in the midst of such turmoil and catastrophe? Quite simply, our one hope for spiritual safety during these turbulent times is to turn our minds and our hearts to Jesus Christ. The prophet Mormon taught:

“Ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise.

“Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope” (Moroni 7:41–42).

Faith in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ, is absolutely essential for us to maintain a balanced perspective through times of trial and difficulty. Remember, nothing will occur in our lives that He does not understand. Alma taught, “And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11).

Please turn to Him if you are discouraged and struggling for direction in your life. Armed with the shield of faith, we can overcome many of our daily challenges and overpower our greatest weaknesses and fears, knowing that if we do our best to keep the commandments of God, come what may, we will be all right.

Of course that does not necessarily mean that we will be spared personal suffering and heartache. Righteousness has never precluded adversity. But faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—*real* faith, whole-souled and unshakable—is a power to be reckoned with in the universe. It can be a causative force

through which miracles are wrought. Or it can be a source of inner strength through which we find peace, comfort, and the courage to cope.

### Hope grows out of faith

As we put our faith and trust to work, hope is born. Hope grows out of faith and gives meaning and purpose to all that we do. It can even give us the peaceful assurance we need to live happily in a world that is ripe with iniquity, calamity, and injustice.

As the end of the Savior’s mortal ministry drew near, He offered this reassuring hope to His beloved disciples: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Hope is a precious principle by which to live. However, some among us may have lost all hope because of sin and transgression. A person can become so deeply immersed in the ways of the world that he sees no way out and loses all hope. My plea to all who have fallen into this trap of the adversary is to never give up! Regardless of how desperate things may seem or how desperate they may yet become, please believe me, you can always have hope. Always.

### Repentance brings a father peace

Recently I had the privilege of performing the temple sealing ordinances for a wonderful family. It was a beautiful occasion, as such ceremonies almost always are. But if you had known the father of this family several years earlier, you would have understood what a miracle was taking place in the house of the Lord that day. With his permission I quote from a letter he wrote to me:

“I was born into the Church and was taught the gospel at my mother’s

knee. Through her diligence and perseverance, she kindled a small ember of testimony that never left me even through some of the roughest times of my life. In my teen years Satan hit me hard. It was during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a time of great turmoil, and Satan was hard at work on me. I was taken with the practice of free drugs, free love, free fun, and the rest of the world be damned. Beginning with my first drink of alcohol, I began to slowly deteriorate. After alcohol, other drugs were that much easier to use. In order to take drugs, you must become a good liar. You learn to do whatever it takes to conceal your behavior from others.

"After many years of living this way, all my moral fiber seemed to be completely eroded away. I had a minimal amount of conscience and had sunk to the depths of despair and depression. I watched friends die from drugs and suicide. As time passed, my friends and I were exposed to the criminal justice system. In fact, many of my former friends are still in prison. Had it not been for the small flicker of testimony instilled in me by my mother when I was a child, to know that Heavenly Father could still love me, I have reservations as to whether I would even be writing this letter today."

Some parents might have given up hope on this prodigal son, but not this man's mother. She continued to believe that he would find his way back to the teachings of his childhood and once again place his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. With the loving support of his family and friends, that is exactly what he did. Let me read again from his letter:

"If there is one thing I have learned, it is that no matter how lost you feel, no matter how low you may have sunk, there can be forgiveness and peace. I learned that the further one drifts from the Lord, the harder it is to return to Him and His teachings. But once I opened my heart and called

out in prayer to Heavenly Father to help me in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, I came to know the power of repentance and the blessings of obedience to God's commandments."

Brothers and sisters, I wish all of you could have been with us in the temple that day to feel the joy of hope fulfilled. I am sure you would have sensed, as I did, the rekindled love for God and the sublime happiness that filled the heart of my friend's mother as her four sons, their companions, and other family members surrounded her in the sealing room.

### **Faith, hope, and charity**

The Apostle Paul taught that three divine principles form a foundation upon which we can build the structure of our lives. They are faith, hope, and charity. (See 1 Corinthians 13:13.) Together they give us a base of support like the legs of a three-legged stool. Each principle is significant within itself, but each also plays an important supporting role. Each is incomplete without the others. Hope helps faith develop. Likewise, true faith gives birth to hope. When we begin to lose hope, we are faltering also in our measure of faith. The principles of faith and hope working together must be accompanied by charity, which is the greatest of all. According to Mormon, "charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever" (Moroni 7:47). It is the perfect manifestation of our faith and hope.

Working together, these three eternal principles will help give us the broad eternal perspective we need to face life's toughest challenges, including the prophesied ordeals of the last days. Real faith fosters hope for the future; it allows us to look beyond ourselves and our present cares. Fortified by hope, we are moved to demonstrate the pure love of Christ through daily acts of obedience and Christian service.

### The peace of God

I assure you, my brothers and sisters, that our Heavenly Father is aware of us individually and collectively. He understands the spiritual, physical, and emotional difficulties we face in the world today. In fact, they are all part of His plan for our eternal growth and development. And His promise to us is sure: "He that endureth in faith and doeth my will, the same shall overcome" (D&C 63:20).

The Savior promised that "no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper. . . . This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord" (3 Nephi 22:17).

May we all find the "peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Phi-

lipians 4:7), which can be found only through charity, faith, and hope.

May I leave you my testimony that I know that the Lord Jesus Christ lives. He has restored His Church to the earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Our assurance of eternal life rests in our love of God and the keeping of His commandments. This knowledge gives me hope and faith. May it be so with each of you, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Monson

We have just heard from Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker at this session.

## Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

### Bonfires of testimony

Many years ago, large packs of wolves roamed the countryside in Ukraine, making travel in that part of the world very dangerous. These wolf packs were fearless. They were not intimidated by people or by any of the weapons available at that time. The only thing that seemed to frighten them was fire. Consequently, travelers who found themselves away from cities developed the common practice of building a large bonfire and keeping it burning through the night. As long as the fire burned brightly, the wolves stayed away. But if it were allowed to burn out and die, the wolves would move in for an attack. Travelers understood that building and maintaining a roaring bonfire was not just a matter of convenience or comfort; it was a matter of survival. (See Mary Pratt Parrish, "Guardians of the Covenant," *Ensign*, May 1972, p. 25.)

We do not have to protect ourselves from wolf packs as we travel the

road of life today, but, in a spiritual sense, we do face the devious wolves of Satan in the forms of temptation, evil, and sin. We live in dangerous times when these ravenous wolves roam the spiritual countryside in search of those who may be weak in faith or feeble in their conviction. In his first epistle, Peter described our "adversary the devil, as a roaring lion [that] walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). The Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith that "enemies prowl around thee like wolves for the blood of the lamb" (D&C 122:6). We are all vulnerable to attack. However, we can fortify ourselves with the protection provided by a burning testimony that, like a bonfire, has been built adequately and maintained carefully.

Unfortunately, some in the Church may believe sincerely that their testimony is a raging bonfire when it really is little more than the faint flickering of a candle. Their faithfulness has more