

way of life. Even though over age, he returned to finish high school, and now he provides for his family and encourages his children in their search for truth.

Follow the leaders

Since I touched upon the subject of the gathering of the Saints, I must read a verse from the Doctrine and Covenants:

"I say unto you, that it shall not be given to any one to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, except he be ordained by some one who has authority, and it is known to the church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the church" (D&C 42:11).

There are some among us now who have *not* been regularly ordained by the heads of the Church and who tell of impending political and economic chaos, the end of the world—something of the "sky is falling, chicken licken" of the fables. They are misleading members to gather to colonies or cults.

Those deceivers say that the Brethren do not know what is going on in the world or that the Brethren approve of their teaching but do not wish to speak of it over the pulpit. Neither is true. The Brethren, by virtue of traveling constantly everywhere on earth, certainly know what is going on and by virtue of prophetic insight are able to read the signs of the times.

Do not be deceived by them—those deceivers. If there is to be any gathering, it will be announced by those who have been regularly ordained and who are known to the Church to have authority.

Come away from any others. Follow your leaders, who have been duly ordained and have been publicly sustained, and you will not be led astray.

The Lord said:

"The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.

"Light and truth forsake that evil one. . . .

"I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth" (D&C 93:36–40).

God grant that as a church and as families and as individuals we can bring up our children, our youth, in light and truth and that they may receive the testimony of Him of whom we bear witness—our Redeemer, our Savior, even Jesus Christ—for which I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Council of the Twelve has just spoken to us.

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder David B. Haight, also a member of the Twelve, and he will be followed by Sister Betty Jo Jepsen, First Counselor in the Primary General Presidency.

Elder David B. Haight

Forever I will gratefully acknowledge our Lord's blessings to me, which I do again at this time.

As directed, we have assembled "to worship the King, the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 14:16) and to be built up in our faith and desires for righteousness. We testify to one another of our Master and receive counsel from those

appointed to administer the affairs of His kingdom here on earth.

Conferences of this Church are far more than a convention where views are expressed or policies adopted by vote, but they are assemblies where the mind and the will of the Lord is manifested by His servants. The Church is not a democracy—it is a kingdom.

Warning against moral decline

Thoughtful, concerned people in many areas and nations of the world, as well as Latter-day Saints, are concerned with the growing pressures and influence of a disturbing cultural movement downgrading social and religious values and standards of morality. Each succeeding generation has weakened or lessened previously held Christ-centered ideals and values.

Michael Hirsley, who writes for the *Chicago Tribune*, recently observed that predicting America's religious future is risky business—that "the nation's most widely accepted prejudice is anti-Christian" (*The Billings Gazette*, 16 May 1992).

The actual signs of the times are threatening. Where will they lead? I, for one, am concerned.

Previous periods of moral decline brought forth divine attention. In past times, as at present, prophets of God have delivered a voice of warning. The Lord said to Ezekiel, "I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word . . . , and give them warning from me" (Ezekiel 3:17).

From what we are witnessing happening in the world around us, I am impressed today to raise a voice of warning for mankind to prepare—by repentance—for the great day of the Lord (see D&C 1:11–12).

Parable of the squirrel and the dog

I am indebted to Elder Dallin Oaks for an account, a modern-day parable which I refer to as the parable of the bushy-tailed squirrel, the tree, and the dog, which illustrates my concern:

As two men walked across an eastern university campus, they were attracted by a crowd of people surrounding a large maple tree. As they approached, they noticed that the

crowd was being amused by the antics of a fox-tailed squirrel circling the tree, climbing it, and running back down again. A red Irish setter dog crouched nearby, intently watching the squirrel. Each time the squirrel ran up the tree out of sight, the dog would slowly creep toward the tree. The squirrel paid little attention as the dog crept closer and closer, patiently biding its time. People watching this entertaining drama unfold knew what could happen, but they did nothing until in a flash the dog, catching the squirrel unaware, had it in the grip of his sharp teeth.

The people then rushed forward in horror, forcing the dog's mouth open to rescue the squirrel. It was too late. The squirrel was dead. Anyone could have warned the squirrel or held back the dog. But they had been momentarily amused and had watched silently while evil slowly crept up on good. When they rushed to the defense, it was too late.

We see around us daily that which is portrayed in this parable. We sit idly by, watching as an insidious stream of profanity, vulgarity, and demeaning behavior, a mocking of righteous ideals and principles, invades our homes and lives through most types of media, teaching our children negative values and moral corruption. We then become upset when our children perform differently than we would wish and social behavior continues to deteriorate.

Governments abandoning God's principles

One newspaper headline reads, "The Battle Lines Are Clearly Drawn for America's . . . Cultural War." The article then asks:

"Who determines 'the norms by which we live . . . and govern ourselves' [?]? Who decides what is right and wrong, moral and immoral, beautiful and ugly . . . ? Whose beliefs shall form the basis of law? . . .

"Our [cultural challenge] is about 'who we are' and 'what we believe'" (Patrick J. Buchanan, *Salt Lake Tribune*, 13 Sept. 1992, sec. A, p. 15).

Cal Thomas of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that some see "the state as either equal or superior to God in human affairs. Theirs is an uninvolved god who trickles down blessings when we want them, but whose commands are to be ignored when he asks us to do something we don't want to do.

"The fact is that our laws came from a standard of righteousness that was thought to promote the common good, or 'general welfare.' . . . That standard has been abandoned as biblical illiteracy has flourished, thanks in part to the state's antipathy toward immutable and eternal truths.

"William Penn warned, 'If we are not governed by God, then we will be ruled by tyrants.' One's view of God and his requirements for our personal lives determines one's view of the role of the state in public life. . . .

"Benjamin Franklin . . . observed that if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without God's knowledge, 'can an empire rise without his aid?'"

"The late philosopher-theologian Francis Schaeffer wrote that 'God has ordained the state as a *delegated* authority; it is not autonomous. The state is to be an agent of justice, to restrain evil by punishing the wrongdoer, and to protect the good in society. When it does the reverse, *it has no proper authority*. It is then a usurped authority and as such it becomes lawless and is tyranny.' . . .

"This is what the culture war is about. It is a conflict between those who recognize an . . . existing God who has spoken about the order of the universe, the purpose of the state and the plan for individual lives and those who think those instructions are unclear, or open to interpretation, or that God is irrelevant to the debate or doesn't exist and we are on our own. . . .

"[Thirty years ago] students could still pray and read the Bible in school, abortion was illegal and 'gay rights' meant the right to be happy. . . . The issue now is whether we will become our own god" (Cal Thomas, *Salt Lake Tribune*, 18 Sept. 1992, sec. A, p. 18).

No wonder Isaiah, speaking under inspiration, declared, "Neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8).

Unchangeable, God-centered principles and ideals adopted by our Founding Fathers not only form the basis of freedom but are the rivets that hold it together. There is a vast difference between principles that are unchangeable and preferences where there is a choice.

There should be no question about our standards, our beliefs—about who we are!

Faith and courage of pioneers

Eyewitnesses of participants declare of the faith and courage of the converts who left their homes in America or Scotland or Sweden, as well as their families and material possessions, to join with Brigham Young and thousands of pioneers in establishing the Zion Joseph spoke about in the far west. Joseph Smith—their prophet, teacher, and friend—had seen God! He saw the living Christ! Few of all ever created have ever glimpsed such a vision—Peter, James, and John; Moses; Abraham; and Adam—only a few, ever. Joseph Smith belonged to an elite group who had been tried, trusted, and found true. He was one of those described by Abraham as one of the "noble and great ones" (Abraham 3:22) who became one of the Lord's choice servants while here on earth.

Courageous and faithful people by the tens of thousands heard and believed the glorious message of a new hope for a better way of life. Did they expect to find riches at the end of the

newly found rainbow? A life of comfort and ease? To the contrary! There was to be heartache, cold, pain, and hunger—with insults and injury, including tragic loss of life. It was the assurance they knew and felt of divine direction that expanded their faith to withstand such hardships.

Men and women of strong physical and spiritual strength conquered the wilderness and established what Isaiah saw seven hundred years before the birth of Christ when he wrote:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the . . . Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

“And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2–3).

What was their purpose? What was their motive? Not for the gold in California, but that they might worship God Almighty according to the dictates of their conscience. Such was their motive—to establish the Lord’s Church and teach the eternal principles revealed to their prophet, Joseph Smith. They had risked everything they had and were willing to endure any hardship. The recorded history of their journey and of the early beginnings in this valley is one of civilization’s finest hours.

There was little inviting in this endeavor except faith. In fact, they had been warned that nothing would grow; now farms, cities, and towns flourish. They were builders, not destroyers. They had a majestic dream of great things and lofty ideals—of homes and gardens, temples and meetinghouses, schools and universities. It would take work—hard work—and everyone’s best efforts to make it happen. They became experienced colonizers and bene-

factors to our nation and to humanity. Many of us are products of that early inspired colonization—its teachings and blessings of the value of hard work coupled with desire and faith for a better way of life.

The depth of their faith in a living God and their loyalty and obedience, as well as their solid foundation of righteousness, inspire us today. They believed that they had started on their way toward perfection—a process to be pursued laboriously throughout a lifetime. President Kimball declared, “[But] to each person is given a pattern—obedience through suffering, and perfection through obedience” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], p. 168).

Their pathway was straight, uncluttered, unbending: they were to live the commandments of God and endure to the end. Today we know how we should live. We know right from wrong.

Teach children the Lord’s ways

We are to teach and train our children in the ways of the Lord. Children should not be left to their own devices in learning character and family values, or in listening to and watching unsupervised music or television or movies as a means of gaining knowledge and understanding as to how to live their lives!

The Lord has clearly commanded that parents are to teach their children to do good (see Alma 39:12) and to teach them “the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, [or] the sin [shall] be upon the heads of the parents. . . .

“And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord” (D&C 68:25, 28).

“And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked;

neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God. . . .

“But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another” (Mosiah 4:14–15).

Obedience will protect us

A concerned God—by His own finger—wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone. They represent the basic law of the Almighty and have formed the underlying elements of civil and religious law ever since.

The Sermon on the Mount, given by our Lord Himself, details principles and instructions of heavenly origin.

Both of these divine statements of instruction—principles of which are so effectively taught in much greater detail in the Book of Mormon and

the Bible and our other scriptures—if obeyed, will strengthen mothers and fathers and sons and daughters, who all have equal duty to study the scriptures and gain strength and understanding of eternal things.

The only sure way to protect ourselves and our families from the onslaught of the teachings of the world is to commit to live the commandments of God; to attend our Church meetings, where we can learn and be strengthened in our testimonies and partake of the sacrament to renew our covenants; and to prepare ourselves to worthily enter the temple, where we may find a refuge from the world and a place of renewal of our capacity to cope with the evils of the world. I so declare to you as I leave you my witness and testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sister Betty Jo N. Jepsen

A friend of mine was encouraging her children to get into the car so they would not be late for their Sunday meetings. “Please hurry, Matthew,” she said. “I’m coming, I’m coming,” came a voice from somewhere in another part of the house. Mother replied, “Yes, and so is Christmas!”

At that moment three-year-old Matthew appeared in the nearby doorway, and he said, “Oh, goody, goody, I just love Christmas.” Today I am here to tell you that I just love Christmas too. And one of the wonderful things about being members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that we make the events of the Christmas season a part of our day-to-day living.

Pondering the Savior’s birth

As I read the account of the birth of my Savior, I long to have the experi-

ence the Wise Men had—to be led by a star; or to experience what the shepherds did—to be invited to Bethlehem, invited by a choir of angels. I want to kneel at the manger and smell the clean straw and see that tiny baby with His earthly mother, to witness for myself this miracle. I believe that in every mortal there is an instinctive desire to come unto Christ. Perhaps we have a basic human need, because each of us is a child of God, to make that commitment to the spiritual part of our being. We each try to meet this need according to what we know.

As members of His true Church, perhaps we do not need to be taught new things as much as we need to be reminded of what we already know. This is what pondering the birth of our Savior does for all of us. I believe it reminds our mortal minds of things our spirits already know.