

Earl C. Tingey of the Presidency of the Seventy.

---

The choir sang "Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah."

Elder Earl C. Tingey offered the invocation.

---

### President Faust

The choir will now sing "Lead, Kindly Light." Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will then be our first speaker.

---

The choir sang "Lead, Kindly Light."

---

## Elder L. Tom Perry

### Remembering past events and blessings

I am sure I will always remember being the first speaker in the last session of this historic general conference. It not only is the last session of this conference; it is the last session of this decade. It is the last session which will bear the date of the 1900s. This session ought to be worthy of a special journal entry. Historic events especially catch our attention as we remember the past and anticipate the future. During the last few weeks of this year, the airwaves will be flooded with highlights of the major events of the 20th century. Forecasters will be attempting to direct our attention to the possibilities of the 21st century. As believers who have embraced the gospel of our Lord and Savior, this should also be a special time of remembering His blessings to His believing children and the promises of even greater blessings in the future.

### The Israelites' year of jubilee

The Lord, through all periods of time, has reminded His children of their duty to Him. I have always been interested in the way the Lord instructed and tended Israel during the 40 years they wandered in the wilderness. In the book of Leviticus, so named because it relates to the duties and teachings of the Le-

vites, instructions are given for the year of jubilee and its observance. I believe there is a message for us in how Israel celebrated that special year. We read from the 25th chapter of Leviticus:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying,

"Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the Lord.

"Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof;

"But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. . . .

"And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years.

"Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land.

"And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family" (Leviticus 25:1-4, 8-10).

### **Jubilee was a time to rest and renew**

The laws connected with the jubilee year embraced three points. First, the people were to rest the land so it could be rejuvenated and more productive for future years. Today in our busy, multifaceted lives, the year of jubilee offers an excellent time to evaluate our direction and determine whether our priorities are in order. Have we placed the opportunity for eternal blessings ahead of worldly ambitions? Are there parts of our lives that we could rest for a season in an effort to renew our souls so we can be more productive, especially in the ways that matter most to the Lord?

### **Determining our priorities**

A century ago we entered the age of the great industrial revolution. The creative minds of men were developing all sorts of new devices to make our lives easier. Just consider the last time you remodeled any part of your house, and see how many additional electrical outlets you added to each room. Then think about where you have added extension cords with four to six more outlets to provide power for new electrical devices. Despite all those new laborsaving devices, I would guess your life is more, not less, complicated than ever.

As we enter the 21st century, we are in the midst of an information revolution, the so-called information age, with all of its new challenges and opportunities. Now we are being flooded with information. For many, television is robbing them of valuable family time. The Internet is a new source of information that offers tremendous opportunities as well as another potential—becoming addicted. Unfortunately, with the blessings of the new information age also come challenges, as evil influences have a new medium of transmission and new ways of infiltrating our minds. Worldly influ-

ences enter our homes in new shapes and forms to challenge our resolve to use our time wisely and for the Lord's purposes.

Perhaps we could take a page out of the law of ancient Israel and call "time-out." Let us make a list of those basic activities that add value to eternal man and woman and determine in our year of jubilee that we will discontinue those activities that are of little value and worth that might even jeopardize our eternal welfare. Let us place higher priority on family prayer, family scripture study, and family home evenings and eliminate those activities that fill our lives with worldliness and evil.

Since September of 1995 we have been promoting a leadership training emphasis that encourages us to reestablish the preeminence of the home and the family as the basic organizational unit of the Church, encouraging each family member to set aside family time as its first priority. Could our year of jubilee be a time of reviewing past performances and casting aside those things that impede our eternal progress? Then could we rededicate ourselves to those things that will bring us eternal joy?

### **Preserve our heritage**

The second law connected with the jubilee year was the reversion of property to its original owners or his heirs. If we had this practice today, on January first I could go north to Perry, Utah, and ask of the occupants of the land that my great-grandfather owned to leave so my family could again take possession. What an interesting arrangement, designed to preserve land for each succeeding generation to enjoy as their inheritance. Of course, such practices of land ownership do not exist today—so the people of Perry, Utah, need not worry—but the practice of preserving other forms of inheritance, like our heritage, should be encouraged.

Have we preserved for our children the great stories of how the gospel was brought to and accepted by those early members of our families? Their study and acceptance of the gospel has opened for us the great opportunity of receiving eternal blessings.

### **A young man's conversion**

At the age of 17, my grandfather left Denmark to find a new life in America. He worked his way to Mendon, Utah, where his uncle lived. He was employed by his uncle to help him with his farming. After some period of time, he came to his uncle and said: "You Mormons are a funny people. I have worked with you for many months, and not once have you tried to tell me anything about your religion or invited me to attend church with you."

His uncle asked him if he would like to know something about it, and he answered affirmatively. So his uncle told him about the Prophet Joseph Smith and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. He gave him a copy of the Book of Mormon to read. After doing some reading in the book, my grandfather gave it back to his uncle and said, "I don't see anything in that book that has much value to me."

The next day he was out plowing the field, and his thoughts turned to the story his uncle had told him about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. He thought in his mind that no young man with limited education could have produced such a book. Maybe he should give it a second look. He asked his uncle if he could borrow the book again. This time he could not put it down. The Spirit burned within him that this book was true. He asked for baptism and remained active throughout his entire life.

These conversion experiences of our family members, who show us great com-

mitment and faith throughout their lives, give us so much of what we enjoy today through the fruits of the gospel. Surely a knowledge of that faith and commitment must be passed on from generation to generation to deepen our desire to live with the same conviction they exhibited in their lives. Surely their testimonies add conviction and strength to our testimonies.

### **Helaman preserved his heritage**

Helaman had a special way of transferring his heritage to his sons: he named his sons after his noble ancestors to help his sons remember them and their works. The scriptures record:

"Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should remember to keep the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these words. Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good" (Helaman 5:6).

### **Free yourself from spiritual bondage**

Finally, during the year of jubilee, all of the Israelites who were in bondage for some reason were granted their freedom. Of course, the practice of slavery has long since been abolished in almost all parts of the world. Nevertheless, if we are not watchful, any one of us can become ensnared, then enslaved, by the evil one.

Individually we have been given our agency. It was a blessing granted to man from the very beginning. The Lord declared to Adam, "And it is given unto them to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves, and I

have given unto you another law and commandment" (Moses 6:56).

Given that there must be opposition in all things (see 2 Nephi 2:11), with agency comes the need to choose good from evil. Moreover, agency also opens the possibility for sin; that, in turn, creates the need for repentance. President Kimball has said:

"Sin is intensely habit-forming and sometimes moves men to the tragic point of no return. Without repentance there can be no forgiveness, and without forgiveness all the blessings of eternity hang in jeopardy. As the transgressor moves deeper and deeper in his sin, and the error is entrenched more deeply and the will to change is weakened, it becomes increasingly nearer hopeless and he skids down and down until either he does not want to climb back up or he has lost the power to do so" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [1982], 83).

He then counseled us:

"*Substitute habits, change environment.* Change comes by substituting new habits for old. You mold your character and future by thoughts and actions.

"You can change by changing your environment. Let go of lower things, and reach for higher. Surround yourself with the best in books, music, art, and people" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 172).

As we approach a new century, certainly it is a time to examine what our patterns have been in the past. Could this be a time of reinforcing those practices that lead to our good and betterment? Could it be a time of disregarding those habits and activities which ensnare and enslave us in the traps of the adversary and retard our eternal progress?

### Our religion should lift us

Harry Emerson Fosdick once wrote: "Some Christians carry their religion on their backs. It is a packet of beliefs and practices which they must bear. At times it grows heavy and they would willingly lay it down, but that would mean a break with old traditions, so they shoulder it again. But real Christians do not carry their religion, their religion carries them. It is not weight; it is wings. It lifts them up, it sees them over hard places, it makes the universe seem friendly, life purposeful, hope real, sacrifice worthwhile. It sets them free from fear, futility, discouragement, and sin—the great enslavers of men's souls. You can know a real Christian, when you see him, by his buoyancy" (*Twelve Tests of Character* [1923], 87–88).

I hope it is clearly evident when the world looks at us that we are known for our buoyancy—that we live, believe, and practice real Christian ideas and doctrine. May God bless us that we may look forward to a new century with faith, testimony, confidence, and determination to better prepare ourselves for the eternal life we are all seeking. May the new year begin with the sound of trumpets and joyful shouts as we make the most of this coming year of jubilee in my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Faust

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He will be followed by Elder Richard H. Winkel of the Seventy.