

Preparing for That Which Is to Come

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I have had the rare privilege of teaching at BYU for nearly 46 years—a dream that I feared might never be realized because of my being blind. Today I would like to share some lessons gleaned from what I have taught as well as some others from my own life. Specifically, I would like to talk about the progress of the Church until the time I joined the BYU faculty in 1961, what has happened since that time, what lies ahead, and what our individual roles should be in preparing “for that which is to come” (D&C 1:12). I pray that the Spirit will be with us, that we might truly “understand one another, [be] edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:22).

Today is April 3—a significant date in our history. Let’s go back 171 years to April 3, 1836. Just one week earlier, at Kirtland, Ohio, the Saints had dedicated their first temple. They had to overcome poverty and persecution as they built the House of the Lord, and truly their sacrifice did bring “forth the blessings of heaven.”¹ In the dedicatory service and meetings that followed during the next few days, many present saw visions or spoke in tongues. Joseph Smith’s history declared that “this was a time of rejoicing long to be remembered.”²

These spiritual events reached a climax on Easter Sunday, April 3. After the day’s

services had been concluded, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery knelt in prayer. They were in the Melchizedek Priesthood pulpits, a “veil” or canvas curtain having been lowered to seclude them from the rest of the room. Joseph recorded that the Savior appeared and accepted the recently dedicated temple and promised, “I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house.” The Lord prophesied that “the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands shall greatly rejoice” because of the blessings made known in this temple “and the fame of this house shall spread to foreign lands” (D&C 110:7, 9, 10).

Keys restored by other heavenly messengers on this same occasion have supported different activities of the Church over the years. The keys of gathering brought by Moses (see D&C 110:11) have been linked with missionary work. Significantly, the Church’s first overseas mission—to Britain—was opened in 1837, just one year after Moses came.

And on the same day in 1836 Elijah the prophet restored keys that would “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the

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children to the fathers” (D&C 110:15). The years immediately following his visit witnessed an upsurge of interest in family history, with important genealogical associations being organized both in Europe and America at this time. Elijah’s keys are commonly associated with temple ordinances and work for the dead; these practices, incidentally, were not restored in Kirtland but rather at Nauvoo.

After Joseph Smith introduced baptism for the dead, the Saints at Nauvoo eagerly went into the Mississippi River to perform this ordinance. Then, in 1842, the Prophet gave the endowment to selected faithful Saints. Elder James E. Talmage described it as a “course of instruction”³ tracing our progress from the time of the Creation until when we return to God’s presence and emphasizing our need to live by high gospel ideals. In his journal Joseph Smith recorded that he had communicated the priesthood keys and principles by which the Saints could ascend into the presence of God.⁴ At about this same time the first couples were married or sealed for eternity. This ordinance promises some of the loftiest blessings the gospel offers.

Even after the Martyrdom of Joseph Smith in 1844, the Saints at Nauvoo completed their temple. About 5,000 Saints received their eagerly anticipated endowment blessings. On February 3, 1846, however, Brigham Young urged the Saints to prepare to leave Nauvoo immediately before the enemies could hedge up the way, promising to build other temples after they had reached the mountains. Noting the people’s “anxiety” to receive their temple ordinances, he agreed to continue another few days.⁵ When I think of the eagerness of those early Saints to receive their temple blessings, I wonder if we take our easy access to temples for granted.

Following the pioneers’ epic exodus, the number of temples continued to grow. The original two temples were lost, but four new ones were built in Utah during the second half

of the nineteenth century. This total doubled during the first half of the twentieth century as temples were built in Hawaii, Alberta, Arizona, and Idaho. Note that it took half of a century to add just four temples. The pace surely has quickened more recently.

As I grew up in Southern California, we eagerly looked forward to the time when we would have a temple there. The annual stake temple excursions to St. George or Mesa were spiritual highlights during my youth. I was in high school when the Los Angeles Temple was announced; I was proud to show a copy of the *Church News* with an architect’s rendering of the temple to friends and even teachers—although, as far as I knew, I was the only Latter-day Saint at our school. I anxiously followed the various stages of temple construction before leaving for my mission. Two and one-half years later I was released just in time to attend the temple’s dedication. During the 1950s the Church also dedicated its first “overseas temples” in Switzerland, New Zealand, and England.

During this same time education had been a major component in the Church’s work of “perfecting the Saints” (see Ephesians 4:12). Brigham Young Academy, founded in 1875, was the first of about 30 of these Church-sponsored high schools. As college-level courses were added, its name was changed in 1903 to Brigham Young University. During the early twentieth century seminaries and institutes provided part-time religious education to a growing number of high school and college students. With the success of these programs the Church decided during the later 1920s to close most of its schools.

In 1930, however, Church leaders explained three reasons why they were keeping BYU. First, it would be a place for training teachers. (This is still one of the largest majors on campus.) Second, faithful scholars at a Church university could interpret the discoveries of science and the results of research in the light of gospel truths. And, third, the high

standards of its students would be a light to the world.⁶

The Lord has exhorted us, “Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations” (D&C 115:5). In 1930 BYU had only about 2,000 students, but enrollment would explode during the years just after World War II. In more recent times, BYU performing groups, successful athletic teams, and the favorable impression students give to visitors to our campus have enabled you students to truly be a light to the world. I remember President Merrill J. Bateman here in the Marriott Center speaking about the positive impact of what he called “BYU families” on Church units and activities worldwide.⁷ Keep up the good work!

In 1961, when I joined the BYU faculty, the Church only had about 1.75 million members. There were only 13 temples in service. BYU’s student body was about 11,000, and there were still many temporary buildings left over from the postwar boom. Now let’s consider the important strides forward that I have witnessed during the years I have been here at BYU. I remember hearing something Dallin H. Oaks said at an Annual University Conference when he was president at BYU:

Often . . . I have stood at the window of my office, looking out across the northern part of the campus to the Language Training Mission and the temple. I tell the visitors who share this sight that these three institutions—university, mission, and temple—are the most powerful combination of institutions on the face of the earth. They make this place unique in all the world.⁸

When I came to BYU two of these three elements were not yet present: There was no MTC and there was no temple. Gratefully I have witnessed not only growth here on campus but the addition of these other two institutions as well.

Interestingly, the beginnings of what would become the MTC took place during the same

semester that I started teaching here. On December 4, 1961, I had the opportunity of attending the inaugural meeting of what was then called the Missionary Language Institute when the first 29 elders arrived. Then, in 1976, the first phase of the current MTC complex was dedicated by President Spencer W. Kimball. Once again it was my opportunity to be present at this meeting. I heard him challenge the missionaries to learn their languages well and later teach them to their children because these skills would be important to the growing worldwide Church. During the three decades since that day, over a half million elders and sisters who received their orientation here have gone all over the world to share the marvelous message of the gospel.

Returning to the subject of temples, I was a member of the BYU Sixth Stake presidency in 1967 when we were invited to a special meeting. Hugh B. Brown and N. Eldon Tanner, counselors in the First Presidency, announced plans to build the Provo Temple. Two years later I had the interesting experience of attending the temple groundbreaking. Once again with great interest I closely followed the construction of a temple. Then, during the open house, I helped prepare Braille floor plans and organize a special tour for those who were visually impaired.

The temple’s dedication on February 9, 1972, was a special experience. President Joseph Fielding Smith presided. In his dedicatory prayer, among other things, he petitioned, “Let that great temple of learning, the Brigham Young University, . . . be prospered to the full. Let Thy enlightening power rest upon those who teach and those who are taught.”⁹ As a BYU faculty member, I was and am grateful for that blessing. As we left the temple, we were so moved by the Spirit that we didn’t feel like speaking until we were outside. The dedicatory proceedings were carried by closed circuit to several large auditoriums here on campus. Many students told me how those attending

here in the Marriott Center had the unusual and impressive experience of seeing thousands of people exiting this huge arena in reverent silence.

For the next quarter of a century the Provo Temple was the most productive in the Church in terms of endowments for the dead. During that period these ordinances were performed for over 12 million persons—approximately equal to the present worldwide membership of the Church. I, like many thousands of BYU students, have been blessed with the privilege of going to the House of Lord and being strengthened and guided by the sacred ordinances and the Lord’s Spirit there.

The Provo Temple was only the 15th in the Church. Since its dedication the number of temples has continued to grow. New kinds of temples have been designed to meet special needs. A recent article in the *Ensign* described what happened when President Gordon B. Hinckley could not find a place to build a temple in crowded Hong Kong. He was inspired to have the existing mission office removed and to have a larger building designed that would incorporate sacred temple facilities as well as the public offices and a chapel.¹⁰ Another new kind of temple came about in Vernal, Utah, when the old stake tabernacle, no longer in use, was remodeled into a beautiful temple. In like manner, the historic Latter-day Saint chapel in Copenhagen, Denmark, has been transformed into a temple. (I have shared with my Church history classes the inspirational stories of how missionaries gathered at this chapel as they were evacuated from Germany and Czechoslovakia at the outbreak of World War II.) A combination of these two concepts was seen when a temple was constructed on the upper floors of the Church building in downtown Manhattan.

Forty-seven temples were in service when Gordon B. Hinckley became President of the Church in 1995. Still, he was anxious to take temples to the people in an even greater way.

Last November I had the opportunity to visit the Mormon colonies in northern Mexico and to learn firsthand from the Saints about a special and significant event that transpired there. As President Hinckley participated in the 1997 centennial celebration of the Juárez Academy, he was impressed with the faithfulness of the Saints there. Though few in number, they have provided countless missionaries and over a hundred mission presidents. While riding back to El Paso, President Hinckley pondered the idea of building smaller temples. When he dedicated the Colonia Juárez Temple two years later, he gratefully acknowledged:

It was here in Northern Mexico, that Thou didst reveal the idea and the plan of a smaller temple, complete in every necessary detail, but suited in size to the needs and circumstances of the Church membership in this area of Thy vineyard.¹¹

Since then, more than 60 of these small temples have been built on every continent. The most recent, temple number 124, was dedicated in Helsinki, Finland.

During my time at BYU the Church has continued to grow worldwide. From 1 million members in the pioneer centennial year of 1947, membership grew to 10 million in the sesquicentennial year of 1997—a tenfold increase during that half century. In this latter year, for the first time, more than half of all Church members lived outside of the United States. At the general conference this past weekend the Church reported that its membership now stands at nearly 13 million. With this growth in membership and with the multiplication of temples internationally, the Lord’s declaration that the fame of the Kirtland Temple should be known throughout the earth certainly has been fulfilled.

Now let us turn to a consideration of what is to be accomplished in the future. Prophecy indicates that the Lord’s kingdom will continue to roll forth until it fills the earth (see Daniel

2:24–45). But there will be challenges and difficulties to overcome. The Lord has commanded, “Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come, for the Lord is nigh” (D&C 1:12). The Master counseled His New Testament disciples, “Watch” and “Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:42, 44).

An experience I had as a missionary brought this lesson home to me. It was a Saturday morning in Laredo during August. We were expecting the mission president’s first counselor the following day to conduct a district conference. I went out early to do some cleanup in front of our chapel. (I had to do this work early to avoid the heat later in the day.) My companion was working inside on some reports. Two other missionaries chose to sleep in. At about 6:30 a car drove up, and out stepped not the president’s counselor whom we expected the next day but the mission president himself! He had come unannounced to look at some property we were buying. In subsequent weeks he went around the mission speaking about the Second Coming and likening it to his visit to Laredo when he found two elders working and two sleeping. (I’m grateful I hadn’t decided to sleep in on that particular morning!)

How must we prepare? I have learned that there are three main sources of guidance to which we may turn. Interestingly, President Neil L. Andersen of the Seventy emphasized these same three channels at his CES fireside talk here in the Marriott Center a month ago. The first is personal direction through the Spirit. President Heber C. Kimball warned, “There will be a great sifting time, and many will fall; for I say unto you there is a *test*, a TEST, a TEST coming, and who will be able to stand?” He then answered his own question: “The time will come when no man nor woman will be able to endure on borrowed light. Each will have to be guided by the light within himself. If you do not have it, how can

you stand?”¹² Sometime after the Martyrdom, Brigham Young saw Joseph Smith in vision. The Prophet instructed his successor: “Be careful and not turn away the small still voice; it will teach you what to do and where to go.”¹³

We often think of revelation guiding the Church only during the days of Joseph Smith or of the pioneers. I am grateful to have been able to teach about evidence of divine guidance in our own day as well. During his 1921 tour of missions around the world, Elder David O. McKay was directed to a secluded garden in Beijing where he could offer a special prayer. Another time he was prompted to leave a volcano overlook just before it crumbled into the lava below. And in Jerusalem he was prompted to take a particular train that enabled him to meet the man with whom he would tour the Armenian Mission.

Matthew Cowley, president of the New Zealand Mission, instructed his missionary assistant to keep his bags packed so they could leave immediately whenever directed by the Spirit to members who needed help. Elder Norman Seibold was prompted to get off trains at certain stations as he sought to locate fellow missionaries needing help during the evacuation from Germany at the outbreak of World War II.

Inspiration was also evident in President Hinckley’s selection of the site for a temple in Guayaquil, Ecuador. After inspecting a half dozen sites, he was impressed to return to the first one and this time go beyond a row of trees and an area of swampy ground. There they found a dirt road leading to a hill overlooking the whole city. As the group stood looking down, tears filling their eyes, they “knew that a prophet had found the site for the temple.”¹⁴

Often it has been necessary to “go forward with faith” as did Nephi when he went to retrieve the brass plates, not knowing how the desired goal could be accomplished (see 1 Nephi 4:6). At a devotional assembly here in the Marriott Center, Elder Glen L. Rudd related

how he drove into a large Caribbean city to find a member who had requested a blessing; even though he didn't have her address, he was prompted to park in a spot that turned out to be right in front of her home.

I have had to do the same thing. During my second year of college my bishop and I filled out my mission papers, not knowing if I could be called with my disability. I did have the privilege to serve, and that experience has had a far-reaching impact on my life. Enjoying the special spirit at a small district conference attended by one of the General Authorities, I was impressed that I should make teaching at BYU my life's work. While in the mission I also met a certain sister missionary, Dawn Houghton, who would become my eternal companion. Together we had to "go forward with faith." On our way back to California after attending general conference, we decided to get married even though I would be in graduate school and Dawn would need to work to support us. When I reached home, I found a telegram waiting that notified me that I had been awarded a Danforth Fellowship that would take care of all our expenses through my receiving the PhD. Blessings don't always come so quickly!

From my study of Church history as well as from my own experience, I have learned that these blessings often come only following diligent effort. For example, the Lord has instructed that He will give us a witness of the truth only after we have studied out the matter in our own mind (see D&C 9:7–9). Only after Henry Burkhart had repeatedly requested permission for East German Saints to go to Switzerland for temple blessings did the Communist leaders offer the possibility of building a temple right there in the German Democratic Republic. Likewise, after the Cowan family had seemingly done everything possible to trace our ancestry in Scotland, a friend who was helping us with research was inexplicably attracted to an ordinary-looking

book in an English secondhand bookstore. It was on an upper shelf so high that he couldn't read its title. When the clerk climbed a ladder to retrieve the book, it turned out to be a history of the very parish from which the Cowans came. We anticipate it will provide the clues we need. Similarly, it was following months of hard work and sacrifice that we had the totally unexpected experience of being presented an award by President Eisenhower at the White House.

I have also learned, however, that inspiration and guidance do not always come just when we would like it. Through Isaiah, the Lord has reminded us, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8).

The scriptures have been a second source of comfort and direction as the Saints have sought to prepare "for that which is to come." Of course the impact of James 1:5 on Joseph Smith and the Restoration of the gospel is well known. Three passages have particularly strengthened me:

In Ether 12:27 Moroni assured us that the Lord allows us to have weakness so that we might become humbled and that if we have faith in Christ He can transform weaknesses into strengths.

A Latter-day revelation suggests a close relationship between the Lord and His servants when He promised: "I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up" (D&C 84:88).

Then I have taken comfort from the Lord's instruction: "Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers" (D&C 112:10).

Our living prophets have been a third major source of direction. Truly, "We thank thee, O God, for a prophet / To guide us in these latter days."¹⁵ General conferences became important to me early on. As members of our Southern California ward returned from conference, they

brought phonograph recordings of selected talks that were played in sacrament meetings. Then, when I was in high school, I rode to Utah and attended sessions in the Tabernacle with my dad. Now I enjoy attending priesthood sessions at the Conference Center with my own two sons.

We have just concluded a great conference. As I prepared this devotional talk, I gained a greater appreciation for what the General Authorities go through as they prepare their talks. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught the following concerning general conference:

*The servants of the Lord will counsel us. You may listen with anxious ears and hearts, or you may turn that counsel aside. . . . What you shall gain will depend not so much upon their preparation of the messages as upon your preparation for them.*¹⁶

Hopefully we prepared ourselves spiritually to receive the inspired messages from our divinely appointed leaders. Now we should implement Elder Harold B. Lee's counsel:

*As the Latter-day Saints go home from this conference, it would be well if they consider seriously the importance of taking with them the report of this conference and let it be the guide to their walk and talk during the next six months. These are the important matters the Lord sees fit to reveal to this people in this day.*¹⁷

Speaking to college students, Elder Spencer W. Kimball counseled:

*I hope you will get your copy of the [conference messages] and underline the pertinent thoughts and keep it with you for continual reference. No text nor volume outside of the standard works of the Church should have such a prominent place on your personal library shelves.*¹⁸

In conclusion, I am grateful to testify that the priesthood keys restored on the third of

April 171 years ago have enabled the Lord's work to progress throughout the earth and that He is guiding His Church today. May we ponder our personal part in helping the Lord's kingdom to roll forth. May we profit from the blessings of the temple and from guidance through the Spirit, inspiration from the scriptures, and leadership from our living prophets as we prepare for the Lord's return. These things I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. "Praise to the Man," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 27, verse 4.
2. Joseph Smith, *HC* 2:392.
3. James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962), 99.
4. See Joseph Smith, *HC* 5:2; 3 May 1842.
5. Brigham Young, *HC* 7:579.
6. See Joseph F. Merrill, "Brigham Young University, Past, Present, and Future," *Deseret News*, 20 December 1930, section 2 (Christmas News), p. 3.
7. Merrill J. Bateman, "A Zion University," BYU devotional address, 9 January 1996.
8. Dallin H. Oaks, "A House of Faith," BYU Annual University Conference address, 31 August 1977, 8.
9. Joseph Fielding Smith, 9 February 1972, in "Dedication Prayer of Provo Temple," *Church News*, 12 February 1972, 5; also "Provo Temple Dedicatory Prayer," *Ensign*, April 1972, 31.
10. See Monte J. Brough and John K. Carmack, "How the Hong Kong Temple Came to Be," *Ensign*, December 2006, 59–61.
11. Gordon B. Hinckley, dedicatory prayer of the Colonia Juárez Chihuahua Mexico Temple, 6 March 1999, in "This Is a Day Long Looked Forward To," *Church News*, 13 March 1999, 7.
12. Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), 446, 450.
13. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young: 1846–1847*, ed. Elden J. Watson (Salt Lake City: Elden Jay Watson, 1971), 529; 23 February 1847.

14. Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 481.

15. “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 19.

16. Boyd K. Packer, “Follow the Brethren,” BYU devotional address, 23 March 1965;

emphasis in original; also Boyd K. Packer, “That All May Be Edified” (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 244.

17. Harold B. Lee, *CR*, April 1946, 68; also “Living in the Bonds of Brotherhood,” *Improvement Era* 49, no. 5 (May 1946): 283.

18. Spencer W. Kimball, *TSWK*, 523.