

We Need Not Fear His Coming

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As I look at this very large congregation, I know how those players from Pennsylvania felt yesterday. I am seized by something of the same paralysis which evidently troubled them. They made a fairly good comeback, but it was too late; and that is what happens to many of us. We finally repent, but it is very difficult to catch up before the gun is fired.

Everyone who stands at this pulpit on such an occasion as this apparently has the same feeling—a feeling of wonder and an appreciation and a reassurance. It is a tremendously impressive thing to know that there are so many of your kind and that the generations of the Church are growing in strength and faith and knowledge of the things of God.

Great and serious is the responsibility of speaking to you. I pray that I may be directed by the Holy Spirit.

At the outset, and by way of introduction to what I may say later—and even at the risk of appearing a little negative—I wish to indulge a personal privilege. Before this large audience I wish to set the record straight on some statements mistakenly attributed to me.

Two or three weeks ago a man handed me a typewritten page or two and asked, “Did you say the things that you are reported in this paper to have said?” I was in a hurry; I quickly

read the statement and responded, “Of course not—I know better than that.” I paid no further attention until more inquiries began to come through the mail from Provo, Rexburg, and other places. Then I knew that I had better make an effort to stop this fabrication which, because of its sensationalism, is evidently being copied and given wide circulation.

It alleges that I recently participated in a missionary conference in South Africa and that, in a question-and-answer period, I was asked concerning the second coming of the Savior. I am reported to have said that he would come on the morning of the Sabbath and that he would come on his birthday. From these alleged premises the originator of this document had consulted a hundred-year calendar and had concluded with some measure of certainty that the Lord would come on April 6, 1986.

The fact is that I was in South Africa with President Kimball for an area conference last

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fall. The further fact is that a meeting was held with missionaries in that area at which the mission president, Elder Neal Maxwell, President Kimball, and I spoke. But there was no question-and-answer period, nor was there any discussion of the second coming of the Savior. The talks given were taped, and I have a transcript of them.

I recall hearing President Heber J. Grant say, many years ago, that falsehood could march around the world while truth was pulling on its boots. I am beginning to understand that. I assume that no one in the Church would think that a member of the Council of the Twelve would make such statements as these attributed to me. Furthermore, should any such idea have come into my mind, it would not have stood unchallenged with the President of the Church seated immediately behind me. The fact is that the whole thing is a fabrication. Why anyone would indulge in this kind of speculation I cannot understand. As Paul advised Timothy, “Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes” (2 Timothy 2:23).

Of course I do not know when the Savior will come. He himself said:

O that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. . . .

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

But know this, that if the Goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. [Matthew 24:36–37, 42–44]

If anyone were to ask me the day and the hour of the Second Coming, I could only answer that I do not know. But while neither I

nor any other man knows when He will come, there are some things that I do know—and that knowledge comes from the scriptures, and the testimony of its truth comes by the power of the Holy Ghost. Although I do not know the time, I look forward to the Lord’s coming.

Recently, having a free evening, I watched on television a series of news programs. Each dealt with conflict and sorrow and oppression in the world. There was war between Vietnam and China and war in Yemen; there was terrible tension in Iran. Those descendants of Abraham, the Israelis and the Arabs, were trading epithets over the peace treaty due to be signed tomorrow. There were charges of corruption in our own land. There was an account of 500,000 children lost in the big cities of America. Many of these are girls, some of them very young, who turn to prostitution and are caught in a trap from which they cannot escape. There were accounts of brutality and terrible perversions.

Turning off the set, I walked past the piano in the living room and picked up the hymn book. There I read these choice words, written long ago by Parley P. Pratt, which echo my own feelings:

*Come, O thou King of kings!
We’ve waited long for thee,
With healing in thy wings
To set thy people free.
Come, thou desire of nations, come;
Let Israel now be gathered home.*

*Come, make an end to sin
And cleanse the earth by fire,
And righteousness bring in,
That Saints may tune the lyre
With songs of joy, a happier strain,
To welcome in thy peaceful reign.
[“Come, O Thou King of Kings,” *Hymns*, no.20]*

Among the things I know and of which I am sure is the fact that he will come again. I

hope that all of you have seen the beautiful and impressive mural on the east wall of the lobby of the Church Office Building in which is portrayed the resurrected Lord giving final instruction to eleven of his apostles. At that time he charged them concerning their future responsibility to take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go. [Acts 1:9–11]

I know likewise that when he shall come the second time he shall come in glory, in contrast with the way he came in the meridian of time. The first time, he who had been the great Jehovah, the Creator of the earth and the God who spoke to the prophets of old, condescended to come as a babe born in a manger in Bethlehem of Judea. He walked the dusty roads of Palestine, “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). He yielded himself into the hands of wicked men and was crucified on Golgotha’s hill.

Now, in this dispensation, the Lord has declared that

The time is soon at hand that I shall come in a cloud with power and great glory.

And it shall be a great day at the time of my coming, for all nations shall tremble.

But before that great day shall come, the sun shall be darkened and the moon be turned into blood; and the stars shall refuse their shining, and some shall fall, and the great destructions await the wicked. [D&C 34:7–9]

There is a phrase in that quotation that intrigues me: “All nations shall tremble.” Man in his arrogance and the great nations in their vaunted power think themselves invincible, but their leaders have not read enough of history.

More than forty years ago I was a missionary in the British Isles. That was the day of the Empire when it could truthfully be said that the sun never set on British soil, and when the Union Jack waved over a fourth of the world. Britain had a poet in those days who wrote “The Recessional,” for which he was severely criticized. But the words of Rudyard Kipling proved prophetic. I have been in many of those lands where once the British Tommies maintained the garrisons while the flag of Britain floated over the nations of New Zealand, Australia, Egypt, India, South Africa, to name a few. In those days the peace of the world was Pax Britannica. Now the Empire is gone; its parts are independent nations, and the British lion that roared so loudly is old and sick and weak.

Listen to Kipling’s words:

*Far-called, our navies melt away,
On dune and headland sinks the fire;
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!*

*Judge of the nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget.*

[“God of Our Fathers, Known of Old,” *Hymns*, nos. 76, 77]

It is easy for me to believe that the nations shall tremble when the Son of God comes again to claim his kingdom, for when that day arrives

the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall He sit upon the throne of glory:

And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a

shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.
[Matthew 25:31–32]

There will be a judgment not only of the nations but also of the people. “Behold,” said the Lord,

now it is called today until the coming of the Son of man, and verily it is a day of sacrifice, and a day for the tithing of my people; for he that is tithed shall not be burned at his coming.

For after today cometh the burning . . . [when] all the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble; and I will burn them up, for I am the Lord of Hosts; and I will not spare any that remain in Babylon. [D&C 64:23–24]

Some years ago one of our brethren spoke of the payment of tithing as “fire insurance”; that statement evoked laughter. Nonetheless, the word of the Lord is clear that those who do not keep the commandments and observe the laws of God shall be burned at the time of his coming. For that shall be a day of judgment and a day of sifting, a day of separating the good from the evil. I would venture a personal opinion that no event has occurred in all the history of the earth as dreadful as will be the day of the Second Coming—no event as fraught with the destructive forces of nature, as consequential for the nations of the earth, as terrible for the wicked, or as wonderful for the righteous.

It will be a time of great and terrible fears, of cataclysmic upheavals of nature, of weeping and wailing, of repentance too late, and of crying out unto the Lord for mercy. But for those who in that judgment are found acceptable, it will be a day for thanksgiving, for the Lord shall come with his angels, and the apostles who were with him in Jerusalem, and those who have been resurrected. Further, the graves of the righteous will be opened and they shall come forth. Then will begin the great Millennium, a period of a thousand years

when Satan shall be bound and the Lord shall reign over his people. Can you imagine the wonder and the beauty of that era when the adversary shall not have influence? Think of his pull upon you now and reflect on the peace of that time when you will be free from such influence. There will be quiet and goodness where now there is contention and evil.

I know that you are familiar with all of this and with much more of that which is set forth in the scripture, but I have felt to repeat it tonight when we are gathered in this fireside service as a reminder to each of us of the faith and the certainty that we have of these coming events. To know when they will come would take from us much of the self-discipline needed to walk daily in obedience to the principles of the gospel.

Most of us seldom think of these millennial events, and perhaps it is well thus. Certainly there is no point in speculating concerning the day and the hour. Let us rather live each day so that if the Lord does come while we are yet upon the earth we shall be worthy of that change which will occur as in the twinkling of an eye and under which we shall be changed from mortal to immortal beings. And if we should die before he comes, then—if our lives have conformed to his teachings—we shall arise in that resurrection morning and be partakers of the marvelous experiences designed for those who shall live and work with the Savior in that promised Millennium. We need not fear the day of his coming; the very purpose of the Church is to provide the incentive and the opportunity for us to conduct our lives in such a way that those who are members of the kingdom of God will become members of the kingdom of heaven when he establishes that kingdom on the earth. Very quickly, by way of conclusion, may I suggest just two or three things, which if observed, will assist.

The prophet Micah declared: “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly,

and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). There is enough for a long sermon in that one injunction. Let me touch on one point only: "To love mercy." As an example, may I read a paragraph from a letter I received only last week from a young woman who is engaged in this kind of activity as president of the Relief Society.

Yesterday [she writes] I spent the better part of the day picking up welfare groceries and delivering them. One of the two cases I called on was tragic. She is a woman who, years ago, was in a fire and her head was badly injured. For years she has undergone constructive surgery and has a number of pins holding her scalp together. She is divorced, and in order to support herself and her four-year-old girl, she works at anything and everything she can find, doing a job here and a job there, until she is through surgery and can return to school to complete her training as a dietician. She has no car and relies solely on her bicycle for transportation in this great and busy city. She has ridden that bike all winter, with her little girl on the back, sometimes going as many as thirty miles in a day in order to get to and from a small job.

A week ago she hit a patch of ice while riding, fell, struck her head, and suffered a concussion. She refused to go to the hospital because she had no money to pay, so she remained in her apartment, suffering from pain until her sister found her and got medical help. Her mother was able to assist her just a little. Her home teacher happened to call and discovered her plight. When I, as the Relief Society president, called her, I discovered she had no food in the house, no medication for her diabetes, and not a cent of money. So yesterday I went to deliver the groceries and take her some medication. What an opportunity to serve one of those so desperately in need!

Love mercy; walk in obedience to the commandment of the Lord by imparting of your substance for the work of this kingdom. Now let me share with you a testimony I heard only

last Sunday, spoken by a man once poor in his childhood and now prosperous in his old age. He stood before the congregation and said,

When I was a boy, on a summer's day I would lie out in the lucerne patch and chew on twigs and look up at the sky and wonder where the windows of heaven were that my parents had spoken of. I couldn't see them in the clouds, and I thought they must be somewhere in the blue. I wondered how the windows could be opened so I could get a Boy Scout uniform and a pony and a bicycle. I never got these things, but I have come to see how the windows of heaven are opened as I have become the beneficiary of the kindness of good and generous neighbors and friends in this ward in which we live.

Finally, pertaining to this general subject, let me read a few more words of revelation. I read to you young people a few words of commandment, and a few more words of promise. The commandments: "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly." The promise: "Then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God." (D&C 121:45.) I have thought of that statement a great deal. It has been my privilege to meet a number of presidents of the United States and leaders, rulers, and governors in other lands, and it is a reassuring feeling to be able to stand in the presence of such men with confidence. As I have thought of that, I have also thought how marvelous it will be if someday I might stand with confidence in the presence of God.

"The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion," the Lord continues in this statement, "and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever" (D&C 121:46)—including, I should like to add parenthetically, that time when the Lord comes at the great day of sifting and separation.

My brothers and sisters, of these things I testify, relying on the revealed word of the Lord; and I humbly pray with sincere desire that each of us may so live our lives here and now that we may have neither fear nor worry concerning that great and dreadful day of his coming. God bless us in our search for truth

and peace and strength, I humbly pray in the name of Him who shall surely come at a time we know not, but whose coming shall be as certain as the coming of the sun over this valley in the morning—in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.