

The Lord Is at the Helm

GORDON B. HINCKLEY

This is a tremendous picture. I do not know how many there are here tonight, but the number is large. And I guess, Brother Peterson, there are as many again out in other halls. There may be forty thousand young people—a few old gray heads, but very few. A few bald heads—more of those. It is very nice to be with you. I am glad you are here.

I prepared a talk for about twenty minutes, and Brother White said, “You will have to go longer than that. Except for the prayers and a musical number, you’re the only thing on the program.” I asked my secretary, when I was leaving town, to call down and put this on the teleprompter. I don’t know whether I’m going to rely on that. I may break loose from my text and just talk a little informally about a variety of things, if there’s that much time. I’ll watch the clock; you watch your neighbor.

I appreciate what Brother Gray said in his prayer. I appreciate what he said concerning President Benson. Everywhere we go, of course, people want to know about President Benson, how he is. He’s doing well for a man of his age, but he’s in his ninety-fifth year. And, as maybe one or two of you may discover, when you’re ninety-five, you’re not what you were when you were fifty-five. Age has a way

of hitting us—sometimes hitting us rather hard. He has difficulty speaking. He has difficulty walking, as might be expected. But he’s still the Lord’s prophet, regardless. We don’t need more revelation at this time. We just need to follow more closely the revelation we’ve already received and we’ll be all right.

Don’t worry. The Lord is at the helm. This is his church. He has made provisions for it to go forward under any set of circumstances that might face it. He has provided leadership in such a way that every man who is ordained an apostle has conferred upon him the keys of the priesthood. That doesn’t mean he is authorized to exercise all of those keys at any time. That prerogative rests with the president of the Church. When he is not functioning as he might wish to be, he has counselors. And, as is made clear in section 102 of the Doctrine and Covenants, they—the two of them, or one of them if the other might be disabled somehow—could function and carry forward the

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work of the First Presidency. And behind the presidency is a backup of twelve apostles, each of whom has received those same keys.

The Church doesn't need to worry about this situation. Things are going forward the way the Lord would have it. We just need to do our own duty and be faithful and true in our own way. And I think your presence here tonight, and out across the nation and the continent, is an indication of your faithfulness, your fidelity to the work of the Lord, your love for this great cause. Thank you for your presence, and thank you for your faithfulness.

I am grateful to be safely here tonight. Yesterday morning I flew to Washington, D.C., and spoke last night at a large gathering. I spoke this morning at another gathering and then got on a plane, and I made it—I am here. But that is rather dangerous living.

I repeat my love for you and my appreciation and my respect. You are good and great people—the cream, as it were, of this generation. You are young men and women of faith and of faithfulness. You pray, and that's a singularly wonderful thing in this day and age of the history of the world—that you actually get on your knees and pray, I believe, night and morning. What a wonderful thing it is that you don't feel sufficient unto yourselves—self-sufficient, egotistical to the point where you think you can make it all alone—that each of you recognizes that there are occasions when you need help, and you need it desperately, and you ask for it. And you know how to ask for it. I hope that the habit of prayer will remain with you all the days of your lives. If there is anything this nation needs, it is a return to prayer, to seeking the guidance of the Almighty, his watch care over us as a people, and the humility that ought to go with prayer. Oh, if only our leaders prayed more and declaimed less. I think we'd be, perhaps, in better condition.

Now, I'm going to talk with you tonight about something that I have spoken about

before. I looked up in my file and found that I talked along these lines here about twenty years ago. None of you were here then. It's time to say it again. It's time to repeat it. Before I get into that, I want to draw two contrasts—or one contrast, perhaps, between two situations.

I picked up the *Washington Post* this morning and thumbed through it. It appeared to me a litany of negativism. If you were to read the *Washington Post* this morning, you might think the whole nation was going down the drain, and the whole world. Oh, Mr. Nussbaum resigned a day or two ago, and Whitewater is on the minds of the people, and a lot of things of that kind.

I contrast that with the optimism I feel concerning the Church. This is the greatest day—the greatest season—in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in my judgment. How wonderful to be alive today. How wonderful to be a part of this great cause at this time in the history of the world and in the history of this church. Never has it been so large. Never has it been so strong. Never has it been so highly regarded. Never has it made the kind of progress that it is making today. I say that with great humility and with great appreciation. I don't discount the glorious days when the Prophet Joseph Smith walked the earth and spoke as a prophet to the people. I don't discount the great, marvelous days of struggle and sacrifice and pain when our people came west under the leadership of President Brigham Young. I don't minimize the accomplishments of any other era of the history of the Church or the greatness of any president who has presided over the Church. I simply say that things are getting better and better. And I feel profoundly grateful for that.

In 1946, 55 percent of the membership of the Church resided in Utah. Today, only 17 percent of the membership of the Church reside in Utah. In 1946, only 6 percent resided in -

inter-national areas. In 1992, 45 percent resided in international areas. We were once a Utah church. Now we are becoming a great universal church, a great international church. Things are happening of tremendous significance.

There were in the Church last year 305,000 convert baptisms. That's the equivalent of about 150 stakes the size of the nineteen stakes that are represented here tonight. Think of it—150 new stakes in a single year. That growth poses tremendous challenges in providing housing, buildings in which to accommodate the people. It provides tremendous challenges in developing leadership, in training people to take over the responsibilities of the work, because this is a church that is operated by a lay priesthood, if you please—"the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker," who by the goodness of their lives become qualified to lead the people and teach them. It is a miracle, my brethren and sisters.

This church operates this, the largest private university in America, if not in the world. We are trying to carry on, I think, the greatest family history program anywhere on earth. I think we carry on perhaps the largest building program. We have before us now requests for hundreds of new buildings this year. Think of it. We won't build them all—we can't move that fast—but we'll build 350 or 400 of them as we've done each year for the past several years. This is a great time of strength and activity.

This is the greatest temple-building era in the history of the Church. It has been my pleasure to dedicate about twenty-three or twenty-four new temples since I came into the presidency in 1981. There never was such an era before, and I don't take credit for that. The president of the Church would have been there in each case—President Kimball or President Benson—had he been able to be there, but they were not because of the circumstances of their health, and that opportunity largely fell to me. We are building temples where just a few years

ago we never would have dreamed of building temples. As you know, we will dedicate this year a new temple in Orlando, Florida, and another in Bountiful, Utah. We've broken ground for a temple in Bogota, Colombia, and for a temple in Hong Kong. We have property now for a temple in Madrid, Spain. We have property for about seven others.

This is a great era. One hundred years were needed for this church to reach a membership of one million. We now add as new members one million people every three and a half or four years. It is significant. It is tremendous. It is wonderful. It is made possible because of people like you.

What a wonderful time to be alive. How enthusiastic I feel about this church. How enthusiastic I think each of you should feel about this church. It is wonderful what is happening. It is the Lord's work. This is the stone cut out of the mountain without hands that is rolling forth to fill the whole earth. And what we see today is but a foreshadowing of greater and more marvelous and wonderful things yet to come. I have only one regret, and that is that I am so old. But it will come—because it is the Lord's work and he is at the helm.

I am glad that you are here. I am glad that you are young, and I hope you are enthusiastic, because there is a terrible ailment of pessimism in the land. It's almost endemic. We're constantly fed a steady and sour diet of character assassination, faultfinding, evil speaking of one another. Read the newspaper columnists. Listen to the radio and television commentators. The writers of our news columns are brilliant, the commentators on the electronic media are masters—but they seem unable to deal with balanced truth, notwithstanding their protests otherwise. The negative becomes the stuff of headlines and long broadsides that, in many cases, caricature the facts and distort the truth—at least the whole truth. The tragedy is that this spirit of negativism seems to prevail throughout the country.

To hear tell these days, there is nowhere a man of integrity among those holding political office. This spirit has infected the atmosphere on university campuses and the workplace, even this campus. The snide remark, the sarcastic gibe, the cutting down of associates—these too often are the essence of our conversation. In our homes, wives weep and children finally give up under the barrage of criticism leveled by husbands and fathers. Criticism is the forerunner of divorce, the cultivator of rebellion, sometimes a catalyst that leads to failure. Even in the Church it sows the seed of inactivity and, finally, in many cases, apostasy.

I come this evening with a plea that we stop seeking out the storms and enjoy more fully the sunlight. I'm suggesting that we accentuate the positive. I'm asking that we look a little deeper for the good, that we still our voices of insult and sarcasm, that we more generously compliment virtue and effort.

I am not asking that all criticism be silent. Growth comes with correction. Strength comes with repentance. Wise is the man or woman who, committing mistakes pointed out by others, changes his or her course. I am not suggesting that our conversation be all honey. Clever expression that is sincere and honest is a skill to be sought and cultivated. What I am suggesting and asking is that we turn from the negativism that so permeates our society and look for the remarkable good in the land and times in which we live, that we speak of one another's virtues more than we speak of one another's faults, that optimism replace pessimism.

Let our faith replace our fears. When I was a boy, my father often said to us, "Cynics do not contribute, skeptics do not create, doubters do not achieve."

I should like to say a few words about America—the nation of which most of us here tonight are citizens. There may be some here who come from other lands. I think I have been in all of the lands from which you come.

I appreciate your people, their innate goodness, their art, their industry, their strength. I have marveled at the beauty of the earth, the wonder and magnificence of God's creations as I have seen them in every part of the world. No land is without its beauty, no people without their virtues, and I hope that you who come from elsewhere will pardon my saying a few words concerning my own native land, America. I know that she has problems. We've heard so much of these for so long. But surely, my brothers and sisters, this is a good land, a choice land, a chosen land. To me it is a miracle, a creation of the Almighty. It was born of travail. The Constitution under which we live is the keystone of our nation. It was inspired of God. Of it the great Englishman Gladstone said, "As the British Constitution is the most subtle organism which has proceeded from . . . progressive history, so the American Constitution is . . . the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man" ("Kin Beyond Sea," *North American Review* 127 [September/October 1878], p. 185).

There is too much fruitless, carping criticism of America. I know that for some the times are dark. There have been dark days in every nation. I would like to repeat the words of Winston Churchill spoken when bombs were dropping on London. The German juggernaut had overrun Austria, Czechoslovakia, France, Belgium, Holland, Norway, and Russia. All of Europe was in the dread grasp of tyranny, and England was to be next. In that dangerous and desperate time, when the hearts of many were failing, this great Englishman said, and I quote—and I remember hearing these words on the radio at the time:

Do not let us speak of darker days; let us speak rather of sterner days. These are not dark days; these are great days—the greatest days our country has ever lived; and we must all thank God that we have been allowed, each of us according to our

stations, to play a part in making these days memorable in the history of our race. [Address at Harrow School, 29 October 1941]

Earlier he had said to his people and to the whole world, following the catastrophe at Dunkirk when the prophets of doom foretold the end of Britain—and, again, I heard him say these words:

We shall not flag or fail. . . . We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender. [Speech on Dunkirk, House of Commons, 4 June 1940]

It was such talk as this, not the critical fault-finding of glib cynics, that preserved the great people of Britain through those dark and deadly days when all the world thought their little island would go under.

It shall be so with America if we will do less of speaking of her weaknesses and more of her goodness and strength and capacity. President Harold B. Lee, speaking to a group such as this at Ricks College, said:

This nation, founded . . . on principle[s] laid down by men whom God raised up, will never fail. . . . I have faith in America. You and I must have faith in America if we understand the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. [Deseret News, 27 October 1973, p. A4]

I do not doubt that we shall have days of trial. I am confident that so long as we have more politicians than statesmen, we shall have problems. But I am certain that if we will emphasize the greater good and turn our time and talents from vituperative criticism, from constantly looking for evil, and lift our sights

to what may be done to build strength and goodness in our nation, America will continue to go forward with the blessing of the Almighty and stand as an ensign of strength and peace and generosity to all the world.

We still hear much talk of economic depression. Some of you here tonight may be unemployed or struggling to make it. Things could be worse. Heaven forbid that we should ever slip again into the kind of monetary quagmire through which we struggled in the 1930s. I was there then. I graduated from the University of Utah in 1932. The unemployment rate was more than 30 percent. Those were days of long soup lines, of suicides that came of discouragement, of a bleakness of life that few of you can understand. But somehow we survived and made it. I hope and pray that such hard times will never come again, but I think it is not impossible or even improbable if enough people, in a spirit of negativism and defeatism, talk about it and predict it. We are the creatures of our thinking. We can talk ourselves into defeat, or we can talk ourselves into victory.

Likewise, it is so in the Church. We even have some who quibble and fret over little things, evidently totally unaware of the majestic destiny of this, the work of God.

When gold was discovered in California in January of 1848, men of the Mormon Battalion were there and participated in the discovery. Completing their contract, they came to the Salt Lake Valley to join their families. Some of them brought with them gold; and in the hard and desperate days that followed, particularly in the bitter winter of 1848–49, many wanted to go to California where life was easier and gold was to be picked from the riverbeds. In that time of gloom, Brigham Young stood before the people in the old Bowery on Temple Square and said:

Some have asked me about going. I have told them that God has appointed this place for the gathering

of his Saints, and you will do better right here than you will by going to the gold mines. . . .

We have been kicked out of the frying pan into the fire, out of the fire into the middle of the floor, and here we are and here we will stay. God has shown me that this is the spot to locate his people, and here is where they will prosper. . . .

. . . We shall build a city and a temple to the Most High God in this place. We will extend our settlements to the east and west, to the north and to the south, and we will build towns and cities by the hundreds, and thousands of the Saints will gather in from the nations of the earth. This will become the great highway of the nations. Kings and emperors and the noble and wise of the earth will visit us here, while the wicked and ungodly will envy us our comfortable homes and possessions. [Autobiography of James S. Brown (Life of a Pioneer), pp. 119–23, cited by Preston Nibley, Brigham Young: The Man and His Work (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1936), pp. 127–28]

What a remarkable statement under such circumstances! My heart goes out to those who were cold and hungry that winter of 1849. I am confident there was much of grumbling and criticism, and understandably so. But how marvelous when a man looked beyond the winter and spoke as a prophet, under the power of the Holy Spirit, of better days to come. Those days have come. This has become one of the great highways of the nations. Millions come to Temple Square. There are hundreds of flights daily in and out of here. Kings and emperors and the noble and wise of the earth visit us here. There's scarcely a week when we do not have some prominent world figure call on us.

Brigham Young went on to say on that occasion:

It is our duty to preach the gospel, gather Israel, pay our tithing, and build temples. The worst fear that I have about this people is that they will get rich in this country, forget God and his people, wax fat,

and kick themselves out of the Church and go to hell. This people will stand mobbing, robbing, poverty, and all manner of persecution, and be true. But my greater fear for them is that they cannot stand wealth; and yet they have to be tried with riches, for they will become the richest people on this earth. [Nibley, Brigham Young, p. 128]

To which I can hear many of you say, "Hasten the day."

I believe it is here. I believe that day, spoken of by Brigham Young with a voice of prophecy that rose above the voices of defeat and criticism, has come. We have been blessed with the bounties of heaven and the bounties of earth. Oh, how magnificently and munificently we have been blessed! Now, with gratitude in our hearts, let us not dwell upon the few problems we have. Let us rather count our blessings and in a great spirit of gratitude, motivated by a great faith, go forth to build the kingdom of God in the earth.

In our individual circumstances let us look for and cultivate the wonders of our opportunities. You are students on this university campus, and beyond here, on the campuses of many other universities. You can be overcome by a spirit of defeatism, or you can reach with eagerness for the opportunity to learn, to develop marvelous associations, and to build great loyalties. It is so easy, under the pressure of the daily grind, to become negative and critical, to be shortsighted, and even go down in defeat. I have been touched by these words spoken by Benjamin I. Wheeler, who at one time served as president of the University of California. Said he to a group of students such as you:

This university shall be a family's glorious old mother, by whose hearth you shall love to sit down. Love her. It does a man good to love noble things, to attach his life to noble allegiances. It is a good thing to love the Church, it is a good thing to love the State. It is a good thing to love one's home, it is a

good thing to be loyal to one's father and mother. And, after the same sort, it is good to be loyal to the university, which stands in life for the purest things and the cleanest, loftiest ideals. Cheer for her; it will do your lungs good. Love her; it will do your heart and life good.

In your associations one with another, build and strengthen one another—"No man is an island, No man stands alone" (words and music by Joan Whitney and Alex Kramer, 1950). We so need help and encouragement and strength, one for another.

On one occasion when the Savior was walking among a crowd, a woman who had been long sick touched his garment. He perceived that strength had gone out of him. The strength that was his had strengthened her. So it may be with each of us. Let me urge you to desist from making cutting remarks one to another. Rather, cultivate the art of complimenting, of strengthening, of encouraging. What wonders we can accomplish when others have faith in us. No leader can long succeed in any society without the confidence of the people. It is so with us in our daily associations. Said the Lord to Peter,

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. [Luke 22:31–32]

Declared Paul, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak"—and then he adds, "and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1).

It is a responsibility divinely laid upon each of us to bear one another's burdens, to strengthen one another, to encourage one another, to lift one another, to look for the good in one another, and to emphasize that good. There is not a man or woman in this vast assembly who cannot be depressed on

the one hand, or lifted on the other, by the remarks of his or her associates.

I was impressed with a Sydney Harris column that I clipped from the *Deseret News* some years ago. He said:

Sir Walter Scott was a trouble to all his teachers and so was Lord Byron. Thomas Edison, as everyone knows, was considered a dullard in school. Pestalozzi, who later became Italy's foremost educator, was regarded as wild and foolish by his school authorities.

Oliver Goldsmith was considered almost an imbecile. The Duke of Wellington failed in many of his classes. Among famous writers, Burns, Balzac, Boccaccio, and Dumas made poor academic records. Flaubert who went on to become France's most impeccable writer, found it extremely difficult to learn to read. Thomas Aquinas, who had the finest scholastic mind of all Catholic thinkers, was actually dubbed "the dumb ox" at school. Linnaeus and Volta did badly in their studies. Newton was last in his class. Sheridan, the English playwright, wasn't able to stay in one school more than a year.

All of this seems to say to me that each of these men, every one of whom later became great, might have done much better in his studies had he received less of criticism and more of encouragement.

For those of you who are married, it is particularly important that you cultivate a positive attitude and constantly look for the virtues in one another. Two students of BYU came to see me some years ago. Six months earlier they had been married. They had declared their love for one another. In a sacred place they had pledged their loyalty one to another for time and eternity. Now, the young man came first. He was disillusioned. He was bitter. He was heartbroken. His wife, he said, did this and did that—simple little things of small consequence, such as leaving the dishes undone when she left for school in the morning. And then came his wife, a beautiful girl of great

talent. She spoke of her husband's faults. He was stingy. He did not pick up his clothes. He was careless. Each had his or her faults. Every one of those faults was easily correctable. The problem lay in the fact that there was a stronger inclination to emphasize the faults than there was to talk of virtues. With a little self-discipline, each could have changed. With a little desire, each could have spoken with a different tone. But neither was willing. They had permitted a negative attitude to destroy the sweetest, richest association of life. They had thrown away with careless and sour words the hopes and dreams of eternity. With criticism and shouting, they had violated the sacred promises that might have taken them on to exaltation.

My dear young friends, don't partake of the spirit of our times. Look for the good and build on it. There is so much of the sweet and the decent and the good to build upon.

You are partakers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel means "good news." The message of the Lord is one of hope and salvation. The voice of the Lord is a voice of gladness. The work of the Lord is a work of glorious and certain reward. I do not suggest that you simply put on rosecolored glasses to make the world look rosy. I ask, rather, that you look above and beyond the negative, the critical, the cynical, the doubtful, to the positive. I carry with me a statement that I took from an article published some years ago on Commander William Robert Anderson, the man who took the submarine *Nautilus* under the North Pole from the waters of the Pacific to the waters of the Atlantic. In his wallet he carried a tattered card with these words: "I believe I am always divinely guided, I believe I will always take the right road, I believe God will always make a way where there is no way" ("If It's 3-to-1 Against Anderson: Can a Congressman Afford a Conscience?" *Look*, 20 April 1971, p. 48).

Said the Lord in a dark and troubled hour to those he loved, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Said he on

another occasion, "Be not afraid, only believe" (Mark 5:36).

Said Nephi when his brothers were plagued with fear and doubt and defeat,

I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. [1 Nephi 3:7]

Said Joseph Smith, the Prophet:

The truth, like the sturdy oak, has stood unhurt amid the contending elements, which have beat upon it with tremendous force. The floods have rolled, wave after wave, in quick succession, and have not swallowed it up. . . . Stand fast, ye Saints of God, hold on a little while longer, and the storm of life will be past, and you will be rewarded by that God whose servants you are. . . . Your names will be handed down to posterity as Saints of God and virtuous men. [Teachings, pp. 184–85]

The very essence of this work is faith. Faith cannot grow in an environment of doubt.

I know that many of you are struggling. Do not lose hope. Some say that your prayers are not answered. Your Father will answer in his own time and in his own way. But answer he will.

Some who are single long for marriage. It will be more likely to happen if there is the kind of positive, faith-prompted attitude that expresses itself in happiness and good cheer. Nobody loves a grumbler.

Our Father knows. He is not unmindful of us. Never forget it. Only forget yourself, your selfish interests and desires, and reach out to others.

I leave my blessing with you this evening, insofar as it is my right to do so. I bless you that you may know of happiness, of accomplishment, of peace in your lives, and much of love, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.