

An Anchor to the Souls of Men

HOWARD W. HUNTER

It is a wonderful privilege for me to be with all of the students and young adults gathered here in the Marriott Center tonight and in many other locations throughout North America. I am also aware that videotapes of these firesides will be sent to many of our international areas where English, Spanish, and French are spoken. I am thrilled that modern technology allows us to reach out to so many of you marvelous young people at a time when the Church is growing very rapidly.

The General Authorities of the Church have great confidence in you and have a genuine desire to stay in touch with you, to know of your concerns, and to offer some words of encouragement, counsel, and reassurance. My purpose tonight is to give just such encouragement and reassurance. I am delighted to be with you.

Life has a fair number of challenges in it, and that's true of life in the 1990s. Indeed, you may be feeling that you have more than your share of problems. These concerns may be very global difficulties, such as the devastating famine we see in Somalia and other places in the world, or the incessant sounds of war in Yugoslavia, or the Middle East, or India, or Ireland, or so many other locations round the world.

Unfortunately, some of these wars have religious or ethnic overtones, and that makes them even more tragic, if that is possible. These last few years we have seen our fair share of economic difficulties and recession in every nation. Sometimes these economic challenges get translated into very immediate problems for college students and those trying to earn a living, and perhaps start a family, in their early adult years.

Years ago there was a popular music group formed at BYU that went on to considerable local stardom and acclaim, a group named The Three D's. They took the name from their three singers: Duane Hiatt, Richard (Dick) Davis, and Denis Sorenson. My fear is that in the nineties, if we were to form a popular singing group among our young people, it might still be called The Three D's, but that could be for Despair, Doom, and Discouragement.

I am here tonight to tell you that Despair, Doom, and Discouragement are not an acceptable view of life for a Latter-day Saint.

Howard W. Hunter was the President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 7 February 1993.

However high on the charts they are on the hit parade of contemporary news, we must not walk on our lower lip every time a few difficult moments happen to confront us.

I am just a couple of years older than most of you, and in those few extra months I have seen a bit more of life than you have. I want you to know that there have always been some difficulties in mortal life and there always will be. But knowing what we know, and living as we are supposed to live, there really is no place, no excuse, for pessimism and despair.

In my lifetime I have seen two world wars plus Korea plus Vietnam and all that you are currently witnessing. I have worked my way through the depression and managed to go to law school while starting a young family at the same time. I have seen stock markets and world economics go crazy and have seen a few despots and tyrants go crazy, all of which causes quite a bit of trouble around the world in the process.

So I am frank to say tonight that I hope you won't believe all the world's difficulties have been wedged into your decade, or that things have never been worse than they are for you personally, or that they will never get better. I reassure you that things have been worse and they *will* always get better. They always do—especially when we live and love the gospel of Jesus Christ and give it a chance to flourish in our lives.

Here are some actual comments that have been made and passed on to me in recent months. This comes from a fine returned missionary:

Why should I date and get serious with a girl? I am not sure I even want to marry and bring a family into this kind of a world. I am not very sure about my own future. How can I take the responsibility for the future of others whom I would love and care about and want to be happy?

Here's another from a high school student:

I hope I die before all these terrible things happen that people are talking about. I don't want to be on the earth when there is so much trouble.

And this from a recent college graduate:

I am doing the best I can, but I wonder if there is much reason to even plan for the future, let alone retirement. The world probably won't last that long anyway.

Well, isn't that a fine view of things? Sounds like we all ought to go and eat a big plate of worms.

I want to say to all within the sound of my voice tonight that you have every reason in this world to be happy and to be optimistic and to be confident. Every generation since time began has had some things to overcome and some problems to work out. Furthermore, every individual person has a particular set of challenges that sometimes seem to be earmarked for us individually. We understood that in our premortal existence.

Prophets and apostles of the Church have faced some of those personal difficulties. I acknowledge that I have faced a few, and you will undoubtedly face some of your own now and later in your life. When these experiences humble us and refine us and teach us and bless us, they can be powerful instruments in the hands of God to make us better people, to make us more grateful and more loving, to make us more considerate of other people in their own times of difficulty.

Yes, we all have difficult moments individually and collectively, but even in the most severe of times, anciently or modern, those problems and prophecies were never intended to do anything but bless the righteous and help those who are less righteous move toward repentance. God loves us and the scriptures tell us he

gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. [John 3:16–17]

The scriptures also indicate that there will be seasons of time when the whole world will have some difficulty. We know that in our dispensation unrighteousness will, unfortunately, be quite evident, and it will bring its inevitable difficulties and pain and punishment. God will cut short that unrighteousness in his own due time, but our task is to live fully and faithfully and not worry ourselves sick about the woes of the world or when it will end. Our task is to have the gospel in our lives and to be a bright light, a city set upon a hill that reflects the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the joy and happiness that will always come to every people in every age who keep the commandments.

In this last dispensation there will be great tribulation (Matthew 24:21). We know that from the scriptures. We know there will be wars and rumors of wars and that the whole earth will be in commotion (D&C 45:26). All dispensations have had their perilous times, but our day will include genuine peril (2 Timothy 3:1). Evil men will flourish (2 Timothy 3:13), but then evil men have very often flourished. Calamities will come and iniquity will abound (D&C 45:27).

Inevitably, the natural result of some of these kinds of prophecies is fear, and that is not fear limited to a younger generation. It is fear shared by those of any age who don't understand what we understand.

But I want to stress that these feelings are not necessary for faithful Latter-day Saints, and they do not come from God. To ancient Israel, the great Jehovah said:

Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. . . .

And the Lord, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed. [Deuteronomy 31:6, 8]

And to you, our marvelous generation in modern Israel, the Lord has said: "Therefore, fear not, little flock; do good; let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail. . . . Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not" (D&C 6:34, 36).

Such counsel is laced throughout our modern scriptures. Listen to this wonderful reassurance:

Fear not, little children, for you are mine, and I have overcome the world, and you are of them that my Father hath given me. [D&C 50:41]

Verily I say unto you my friends, fear not, let your hearts be comforted; yea, rejoice evermore, and in everything give thanks. [D&C 98:1]

In light of such wonderful counsel, I think it is incumbent upon us to rejoice a little more and despair a little less, to give thanks for what we have and for the magnitude of God's blessings to us, and to talk a little less about what we may not have or what anxiety may accompany difficult times in this or any generation.

For Latter-day Saints this is a time of great hope and excitement—one of the greatest eras of the Restoration and therefore one of the greatest eras in any dispensation, inasmuch as ours is the greatest of all dispensations. We need to have faith and hope, two of the greatest fundamental virtues of any discipleship of Christ. We must continue to exercise confidence in God, inasmuch as that is the first principle in our code of belief. We must believe that

God has all power, that he loves us, and that his work will not be stopped or frustrated in our individual lives or in the world generally. He will bless us as a people because he always has blessed us as a people. He will bless us as individuals because he always has blessed us as individuals.

Listen to this marvelous counsel given by President Joseph F. Smith nearly ninety years ago. It sounds as if young people in that day might have been a little anxious about their future as well. I quote:

You do not need to worry in the least, the Lord will take care of you and bless you. He will also take care of His servants, and will bless them and help them to accomplish His purposes; and all the powers of darkness combined in earth and in hell cannot prevent it. . . . He has stretched forth His hand to accomplish His purposes, and the arm of flesh cannot stay it. He will cut His work short in righteousness, and will hasten His purposes in His own time. It is only necessary to try with our might to keep pace with the onward progress of the work of the Lord, then God will preserve and protect us, and will prepare the way before us, that we shall live and multiply and replenish the earth and always do His will. [Joseph F. Smith, CR, October 1905, pp. 5–6]

More recently President Marion G. Romney counseled the Church. This was twenty-five years ago, when the world also knew some difficulty. An American president had been assassinated, communism was alive and menacing, and a war was building up in Southeast Asia. My sons were just exactly your age at that time, and they had some of the same anxieties you have about life and marriage and the future. Here's what President Romney said then:

Naturally, believing Christians, even those who have a mature faith in the gospel, are concerned and disturbed by the lowering clouds on the horizon.

But they need not be surprised or frantic about their portent, for, as has already been said, at the very beginning of this last dispensation the Lord made it abundantly clear that through the tribulations and calamity that he foresaw and foretold and that we now see coming upon us, there would be a people who, through acceptance and obedience to the gospel, would be able to recognize and resist the powers of evil, build up the promised Zion, and prepare to meet the Christ and be with him in the blessed millennium. And we know further that it is possible for every one of us, who will, to have a place among those people. It is this assurance and this expectation that gives us understanding of the Lord's admonition, "be not troubled." [Marion G. Romney, CR, 1966, pp. 53–54]

Let me offer a third example from yet another moment of difficulty in this century. In the midst of the most devastating international conflagration the modern world has ever seen, Elder John A. Widtsoe of the Council of the Twelve counseled people who were worried. Nazism was on the march, there was war in the Pacific, nation after nation seemed to be drawn into war. Mind you this was 1942, not 1992 or 1993. This is what Brother Widtsoe said:

Above the roar of cannon and airplane, the maneuvers and plans of men, the Lord always determines the tide of battle. So far and no farther does He permit the evil one to go in his career to create human misery. The Lord is ever victorious; He is the Master to whose will Satan is subject. Though all hell may rage, and men may follow evil, the purposes of the Lord will not fail. [John A. Widtsoe, CR, April 1942, p. 34]

I promise you tonight in the name of the Lord whose servant I am that God will always protect and care for his people. We will have our difficulties the way every generation and people have had difficulties. Your life as a young college student or working person in the 1990s is no different than any young person's life has been in

any age of time. But with the gospel of Jesus Christ you have every hope and promise and reassurance. The Lord has power over his Saints and will always prepare places of peace, defense, and safety for his people. When we have faith in God we can hope for a better world—for us personally and for all mankind. The prophet Ether taught anciently (and he knew something about troubles):

Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God. [Ether 12:4]

Disciples of Christ in every generation are invited, indeed commanded, to be filled with a perfect brightness of hope (2 Nephi 31:20).

This faith and hope of which I speak is not a Pollyanna-like approach to significant personal and public problems. I don't believe we can wake up in the morning and simply by drawing a big "happy face" on the chalkboard believe that is going to take care of the world's difficulties. But if our faith and hope is anchored in Christ, and in his teachings, commandments, and promises, then we are able to count on something truly remarkable, genuinely miraculous, that can part the Red Sea and lead modern Israel to a place "where none shall come to hurt or make afraid" ("Come, Come, Ye Saints," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 30). Fear, which can come upon people in difficult days, is a principal weapon in the arsenal that Satan uses to make mankind unhappy. He who fears loses strength for the combat of life in the fight against evil. Therefore, the power of the evil one always tries to generate fear in human hearts. In every age and in every era fear has faced mankind.

As children of God and descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we must seek to dispel fear from among people. A timid, fearing

people cannot do their work well, and they cannot do God's work at all. Latter-day Saints have a divinely assigned mission to fulfill that simply must not be dissipated in fear and anxiety.

An apostle of the Lord in an earlier day said this:

The key to the conquest of fear has been given through the Prophet Joseph Smith. "If ye are prepared ye shall not fear." (D&C 38:30) That divine message needs repeating today in every stake and ward. [And, I might add, among every group of college students and young adults in the Church.] [Elder John A. Widtsoe, CR, April 1942, p. 33]

Are we prepared to surrender to God's commandments? Are we prepared to achieve victory over our appetites? Are we prepared to obey righteous law? If we can honestly answer yes to those questions, we can bid fear to depart from our lives. Surely the degree of fear in our hearts may well be measured by our preparation to live righteously—living that should characterize every Latter-day Saint in every age and time.

Let me close tonight with one of the greatest statements I have ever read from the Prophet Joseph Smith, who faced such immense difficulties in his life and who of course paid the ultimate price for his victory. But he *was* victorious, and he was a happy, robust, optimistic man. Those who knew him felt his strength and courage, even in the darkest of times. He did not sag in spirits or long remain in any despondency.

He said about our time—yours and mine—that ours is the moment

upon which prophets, priests and kings [in ages past] have dwelt with peculiar delight; [all these ancient witnesses for God] have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we live; and fired with heavenly and joyful anticipations

they have sung and written and prophesied of this our day; . . . we are the favored people that God has [chosen] to bring about the Latter-day glory.
[HC 4:609–10]

That is a thrilling statement to me: that the ancients whom we love and read and quote so much—Adam and Abraham, Joshua and Joseph, Isaiah and Ezekiel and Ezra, Nephi and Alma, and Mormon and Moroni—all of these ancient prophets, priests, and kings focused their prophetic vision “with peculiar delight” on our day, on our time. It is this hour to which

they have looked forward “with joyful anticipation,” and “fired with heavenly and joyful anticipation they have sung and written and prophesied of this our day.” They saw us as “the favored people” upon whom God would shower his full and complete latter-day glory, and I testify that is our destiny. What a privilege! What an honor! What a responsibility! And what joy! We have every reason in time and eternity to rejoice and give thanks for the quality of our lives and the promises we have been given. That we may do so, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.