

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Miraculous growth of the Church today

Surely and steadily The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints moves across the earth. In Daniel's language it is "the stone . . . cut out of the mountain without hands."¹ Isaiah described what he foresaw as "a marvellous work and a wonder."² It is a wonder! The restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ is filled with miracles, revelations, manifestations of every kind. Many of those have come in our lifetime.

I was 17 years old before there was any stake of Zion anywhere outside North America. There are now well over 1,000 stakes on those distant continents and isles of the sea. We now have 125 temples operating or announced, more than half of which (64) are outside the United States. Again, I was nearly 15 before there was even one temple beyond the states and provinces of the USA and Canada.

We have lived to see the revelation extending the priesthood to all worthy males of appropriate age, a blessing which has accelerated the work in many parts of the world. We have lived to see the publication of our scriptures, wholly or in part, in nearly 100 languages. We have lived to see the long-awaited creation of the Quorums of the Seventy, with great men drawn from many nations and, in turn, deployed to serve in many nations. Most recently President Hinckley has announced a Perpetual Education Fund that has the potential to bless many in even the most distant locations of the earth eventually. And so the internationalizing of the Church goes on.

Ending of assessments and fund raising

I give this brief summary to highlight another miracle, another revelation, if you will, that may have been overlooked by the general membership of the Church.

In a way it was intended to be transparent to the public eye. I speak of the decision made by the Brethren just over a decade ago to cease placing any special assessments or other fund-raising obligations upon the members of the Church at home or abroad.

Inasmuch as this decision was made amidst the very international growth I have just described, how could this be done financially? How could we go to more and more distant locations at the very moment we were removing all ancillary assessments from our people? Logic in the situation might have suggested exactly the opposite course of action.

How was it done? I will tell you how it was done—with the wholehearted belief on the part of the presiding Brethren that the Lord's principles of tithing and freewill offerings would be honored by even the newest member of the Church and that loyalty to such divine principles would see us through.

I was not in the Quorum of the Twelve when that momentous decision was made, but I can imagine the discussions that were held and the act of faith required within the presiding councils of the Church. What if the Brethren were to cease assessments and the Saints did *not* pay their tithes and offerings—what then? So far as I know, that thought was never seriously entertained. They went forward in faith—faith in God, faith in revealed principle, faith in us. They never looked back. That was a magnificent (if nearly unnoticed) day in the maturing of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Five reasons to faithfully pay tithing

But to honor that decision, we must be equally mature as individual members of the Church. May I, then, suggest five reasons why all of us, rich or poor, long-

time member or newest convert, should faithfully pay our tithes and offerings.

To teach your children and grandchildren

First, do so for the sake of your children and grandchildren, the rising generation, who could now, if we are not careful, grow up in the Church with absolutely no understanding as to how their temples, chapels, seminaries, and socials are provided. Teach your children that many of the blessings of the Church are available to them because you and they give tithes and offerings to the Church. Teach them that those blessings could come virtually no other way.

Then take your children to tithing settlement with you, just as President Howard W. Hunter's grandson was taken with his father several years ago. In that experience the bishop indicated his pleasure in young Brother Hunter's wanting to pay a full tithing. In the process of receiving the coins, he asked the lad if he thought the gospel were true. As the boy handed over his full tithing of 14 cents, this seven-year-old said he guessed the gospel was true but "it sure costs a lot of money."³ Well, the buildings, programs, and materials I have mentioned do have an attached cost. That is not an unimportant lesson for our children to learn in their youth.

To claim the Lord's promised blessings

Second, pay your tithing to rightfully claim the blessings promised those who do so. "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."⁴

After she had lost her husband in the martyrdom at Nauvoo and made her way west with five fatherless children, Mary Fielding Smith continued in her poverty to pay tithing. When someone at the tithing office inappropriately suggested one day that she should not contribute a tenth

of the only potatoes she had been able to raise that year, she cried out to the man:

"William, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Would you deny me a blessing? If I did not pay my tithing, I should expect the Lord to withhold His blessings from me. I pay my tithing, not only because it is a law of God, but because I expect a blessing by doing it. [I need a blessing.] By keeping this and other laws, I expect . . . to be able to provide for my family."⁵

I can't list *all* the ways that blessings will come from obedience to this principle, but I testify *many* will come in spiritual ways that go well beyond economics. In my life, for example, I have seen God's promise fulfilled that He would "rebuke the devourer for [my sake]."⁶ That blessing of protection against evil has been poured out upon me and on my loved ones beyond any capacity I have to adequately acknowledge. But I believe that divine safety has come, at least in part, because of our determination, individually and as a family, to pay tithing.

To keep material possessions in perspective

Third, pay your tithing as a declaration that possession of material goods and the accumulation of worldly wealth are *not* the uppermost goals of your existence. As one young husband and father, living on a student budget, recently told me:

"Perhaps our most pivotal moments as Latter-day Saints come when we have to swim directly against the current of the culture in which we live. Tithing provides just such a moment. Living in a world that emphasizes material acquisition and cultivates distrust for anyone or anything that has designs on our money, we shed that self-absorption to give freely, trustingly, and generously. By this act, we say—indeed—we are different, that we are God's peculiar people. In a society that tells us money is our most important asset, we declare emphatically it is not."⁷

President Spencer W. Kimball once spoke of a man who prided himself on his vast acreage and remarkable holdings—groves and vineyards, herds and fields, ponds and homes and possessions of every kind. He prided himself on these but to the end of his life was unwilling to tithe on them or even acknowledge that they were gifts from God. President Kimball then spoke at the man's funeral, noting that this land baron was laid to rest in an oblong piece of soil measuring "the length of a tall man, the width of a heavy one."⁸ In answer to the age-old question "How much did he leave?" he reassured the answer will always be, "All of it." So we would do well to lay up treasures in heaven, where not taxes but doctrines give meaning to words like *estate*, *inheritance*, *testament*, and *will*.⁹

To give God His rightful due

Fourth, pay your tithes and offerings out of honesty and integrity because they are God's rightful due. Surely one of the most piercing lines in all of scripture is Jehovah's thundering inquiry, "Will a man rob God?" And we ask, "Wherein have we robbed thee?" He answers, "In tithes and offerings."¹⁰

Paying tithing is *not* a token gift we are somehow charitably bestowing upon God. Paying tithing is discharging a debt. Elder James E. Talmage once described this as a contract between us and the Lord. He imagined the Lord saying:

"You have need of many things in this world—food, clothing, and shelter for your family . . . , the common comforts of life. . . . You shall have the means of acquiring these things; but remember they are mine, and I require of you the payment of a rental upon that which I give into your hands. However, your life will not be one of uniform increase . . . , [so] instead of doing as mortal landlords do—requir[ing] you to . . . pay in advance, whatever your fortunes or . . . prospects

may be—you shall pay me . . . [only] when you have received; and you shall pay me in accordance with what you receive. If it so be that in one year your income is abundant, then . . . [your 10 percent will be a] little more; and if it be so that the next year is one of distress and your income is not what it was, then . . . [your 10 percent will be] less. . . . [Whatever your circumstance, the tithe will be fair.]"

"Have you ever found a landlord on earth who was willing to make that kind of [equitable] contract with you?" Elder Talmage asks. "When I consider the liberality of it all," he says, "I feel in my heart that I could scarcely raise my countenance to . . . Heaven . . . if I tried to defraud [God] out of that [which is rightfully His]."¹¹

To express love to God

This leads to a fifth reason to pay our tithes and offerings. We should pay them as a personal expression of love to a generous and merciful Father in Heaven. Through His grace, God has dealt bread to the hungry and clothing to the poor. At various times in our lives, that will include all of us, either temporally or spiritually. For every one of us the gospel has broken forth as the light of the morning, driving back the darkness of ignorance and sorrow, fear and despair. In nation after nation His children have called, and the Lord has answered. Through the movement of His gospel across the world, God is relieving the burdens of the weary and setting free those that are oppressed. His loving goodness has made our lives, rich or poor, near or far, "like a watered garden, . . . [from] a spring of water . . . [that faileth] not."¹²

I express my deepest gratitude for every blessing of the gospel of Jesus Christ, especially that greatest of all gifts, the exemplary life and atoning death of God's Only Begotten Son. I know I can never repay heaven for any of this benevolence,

but there are many ways I need to *try* to show my thankfulness. One of those ways is in the payment of tithes and freewill offerings. I *want* to give something back, but I never want it to be (in King David's words) "that which doth cost me nothing."¹³

I testify that the principle of tithing is of God, taught to us in such scriptural simplicity that we cannot doubt its divinity. May we all claim its blessings forever, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Daniel 2:45.
2. Isaiah 29:14.
3. Quoted by David B. Haight in Conference Report, Apr. 1981, 57; or *Ensign*, May 1981, 42.
4. Malachi 3:10.
5. In Conference Report, Apr. 1900, 48.
6. Malachi 3:11.
7. Personal correspondence.
8. In Conference Report, Apr. 1968, 74; or *Improvement Era*, June 1968, 82.
9. See Matthew 6:19–21.
10. Malachi 3:8.
11. *The Lord's Tenth* (pamphlet, 1968), 10–11.

12. Isaiah 58:11; see also Isaiah 58:6–10.
13. 2 Samuel 24:24.

President Monson

We remind the brethren of the general priesthood meeting, which will convene here in the Conference Center this evening at 6:00 P.M. mountain daylight time.

The nationwide Tabernacle Choir broadcast tomorrow morning will be from 9:30 to 10:00 A.M. mountain daylight time. The Sunday morning session of conference will follow immediately thereafter.

As you leave the conference this afternoon, we ask you to obey traffic rules, use caution, and be courteous in driving.

We express gratitude to the combined choir from Utah County for the beautiful music they have provided this afternoon.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following his remarks, the choir will sing "Testimony." The benediction will then be offered by Elder Sheldon F. Child of the Seventy.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

"Who is my neighbour?"

It may very well have been a beautiful, crisp autumn day like this. The Savior was sitting, teaching some of His disciples, when a man identified only as "a certain lawyer" stood and asked Him, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus knew the man's heart and understood the question was a thinly veiled attempt to get Him to say something contrary to the law of Moses.

The Savior responded to the question with two questions of His own: "What is written in the law? how readest thou?"

As you might expect, the lawyer was able to recite the law: "Thou shalt love the

Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself."

"Thou hast answered right," the Savior said. "This do, and thou shalt live."

But the lawyer wasn't satisfied with that. Knowing that there were strict rules and beliefs among the Jews regarding association with those not of the faith, he pressed the Lord for more information, hoping to trap Him in controversy: "And who is my neighbour?" he asked.

It was time, once again, to teach. Jesus drew upon one of His favorite and most effective teaching techniques: a parable, perhaps one of the most beloved and