

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Preparation for the Second Coming

In modern revelation we have the promise that if we are prepared we need not fear (see D&C 38:30). I was introduced to that principle 60 years ago this summer when I became a Boy Scout and learned the Scout motto: “Be prepared.” Today I have felt prompted to speak of the importance of preparation for a future event of supreme importance to each of us—the Second Coming of the Lord.

The scriptures are rich in references to the Second Coming, an event eagerly awaited by the righteous and dreaded or denied by the wicked. The faithful of all ages have pondered the sequence and meaning of the many events prophesied to precede and follow this hinge point of history.

Four matters are indisputable to Latter-day Saints: (1) The Savior will return to the earth in power and great glory to reign personally during a millennium of righteousness and peace. (2) At the time of His coming there will be a destruction of the wicked and a resurrection of the righteous. (3) No one knows the time of His coming, but (4) the faithful are taught to study the signs of it and to be prepared for it. I wish to speak about the fourth of these great realities: the signs of the Second Coming and what we should do to prepare for it.

Signs of the Second Coming

The Lord has declared, “He that feareth me shall be looking forth for the great day of the Lord to come, even for the signs of the coming of the Son of Man,” signs that will be shown “in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath” (D&C 45:39–40).

The Savior taught this in the parable of the fig tree whose tender new branches give a sign of the coming of summer. “So

likewise,” when the elect shall see the signs of His coming, “they shall know that he is near, even at the doors” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:38–39; see also Matthew 24:32–33; D&C 45:37–38).

Biblical and modern prophecies give many signs of the Second Coming. These include:

1. The fulness of the gospel restored and preached in all the world for a witness to all nations.
2. False Christs and false prophets, deceiving many.
3. Wars and rumors of wars, with nation rising against nation.
4. Earthquakes in divers places.
5. Famine and pestilence.
6. An overflowing scourge, a desolating sickness covering the land.
7. Iniquity abounding.
8. The whole earth in commotion.
9. Men’s hearts failing them.

(See Matthew 24:5–15; Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:22, 28–32; D&C 45:26–33.)

In another revelation the Lord declares that some of these signs are His voice calling His people to repentance:

“Hearken, O ye nations of the earth, and hear the words of that God who made you. . . .

“How oft have I called upon you by the mouth of my servants, and by the ministering of angels, and by mine own voice, and by the voice of thunderings, and by the voice of lightnings, and by the voice of tempests, and by the voice of earthquakes, and great hailstorms, and by the voice of famines and pestilences of every kind, . . . and would have saved you with an everlasting salvation, but ye would not!” (D&C 43:23, 25).

These signs of the Second Coming are all around us and seem to be increasing in frequency and intensity. For example, the list of major earthquakes in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2004* shows

twice as many earthquakes in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s as in the two preceding decades (see pages 189–90). It also shows further sharp increases in the first several years of this century. The list of notable floods and tidal waves and the list of hurricanes, typhoons, and blizzards worldwide show similar increases in recent years (see pages 188–89). Increases by comparison with 50 years ago can be dismissed as changes in reporting criteria, but the accelerating pattern of natural disasters in the last few decades is ominous.

The gathering

Another sign of the times is the gathering of the faithful (see D&C 133:4). In the early years of this last dispensation, a gathering to Zion involved various locations in the United States: to Kirtland, to Missouri, to Nauvoo, and to the tops of the mountains. Always these were gatherings to prospective temples.

With the creation of stakes and the construction of temples in most nations with sizable populations of the faithful, the current commandment is not to gather to one place but to gather in stakes in our own homelands. There the faithful can enjoy the full blessings of eternity in a house of the Lord. There, in their own homelands, they can obey the Lord's command to enlarge the borders of His people and strengthen her stakes (see D&C 101:21; 133:9, 14). In this way the stakes of Zion are "for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth" (D&C 115:6).

Accelerating our preparation

While we are powerless to alter the fact of the Second Coming and unable to know its exact time, we can accelerate our own preparation and try to influence the preparation of those around us.

A parable that contains an important and challenging teaching on this subject

is the parable of the ten virgins. Of this parable the Lord said, "And at that day, when I shall come in my glory, shall the parable be fulfilled which I spake concerning the ten virgins" (D&C 45:56).

Given in the 25th chapter of Matthew, this parable contrasts the circumstances of the five foolish and the five wise virgins. All ten were invited to the wedding feast, but only half of them were prepared with oil in their lamps when the bridegroom came. The five who were prepared went into the marriage feast, and the door was shut. The five who had delayed their preparations came late. The door had been closed, and the Lord denied them entrance, saying, "I know you not" (v. 12). "Watch therefore," the Savior concluded, "for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (v. 13).

The arithmetic of this parable is chilling. The ten virgins obviously represent members of Christ's Church, for all were invited to the wedding feast and all knew what was required to be admitted when the bridegroom came. But only half were ready when he came.

Modern revelation contains this teaching, spoken by the Lord to the early leaders of the Church:

"And after your testimony cometh wrath and indignation upon the people.

"For after your testimony cometh the testimony of earthquakes. . . .

"And . . . the testimony of the voice of thunderings, and the voice of lightnings, and the voice of tempests, and the voice of the waves of the sea heaving themselves beyond their bounds.

"And all things shall be in commotion; and surely, men's hearts shall fail them; for fear shall come upon all people.

"And angels shall fly through the midst of heaven, crying with a loud voice, sounding the trump of God, saying: Prepare ye, prepare ye, O inhabitants of the earth; for the judgment of our God is come. Behold, and lo, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (D&C 88:88–92).

Begin preparations today

Brothers and sisters, as the Book of Mormon teaches, “this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; . . . the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors” (Alma 34:32). Are we preparing?

In His preface to our compilation of modern revelation, the Lord declares, “Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come, for the Lord is nigh” (D&C 1:12).

The Lord also warned: “Yea, let the cry go forth among all people: Awake and arise and go forth to meet the Bridegroom; behold and lo, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Prepare yourselves for the great day of the Lord” (D&C 133:10; see also D&C 34:6).

Always we are cautioned that we cannot know the day or the hour of His coming. In the 24th chapter of Matthew, Jesus taught:

“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” (Matthew 24:42–43). “But would have been ready” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:47).

“Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44; see also D&C 51:20).

What if the day of His coming were tomorrow? If we knew that we would meet the Lord tomorrow—through our premature death or His unexpected coming—what would we do today? What confessions would we make? What practices would we discontinue? What accounts would we settle? What forgivenesses would we extend? What testimonies would we bear?

If we would do those things then, why not now? Why not seek peace while peace can be obtained? If our lamps of preparation are drawn down, let us start immediately to replenish them.

We need to make both temporal and spiritual preparation for the events prophesied at the time of the Second Coming. And the preparation most likely to be neglected is the one less visible and more difficult—the spiritual. A 72-hour kit of temporal supplies may prove valuable for earthly challenges, but, as the foolish virgins learned to their sorrow, a 24-hour kit of spiritual preparation is of greater and more enduring value.

Wickedness is spreading across the earth

We are living in the prophesied time “when peace shall be taken from the earth” (D&C 1:35), when “all things shall be in commotion” and “men’s hearts shall fail them” (D&C 88:91). There are many temporal causes of commotion, including wars and natural disasters, but an even greater cause of current commotion is spiritual.

Viewing our surroundings through the lens of faith and with an eternal perspective, we see all around us a fulfillment of the prophecy that “the devil shall have power over his own dominion” (D&C 1:35). Our hymn describes “the foe in countless numbers, / Marshaled in the ranks of sin” (“Hope of Israel,” *Hymns*, no. 259), and so it is.

Evil that used to be localized and covered like a boil is now legalized and paraded like a banner. The most fundamental roots and bulwarks of civilization are questioned or attacked. Nations disavow their religious heritage. Marriage and family responsibilities are discarded as impediments to personal indulgence. The movies and magazines and television that shape our attitudes are filled with stories or images that portray the children of God as predatory beasts or, at best, as trivial creations pursuing little more than personal pleasure. And too many of us accept this as entertainment.

The men and women who made epic sacrifices to combat evil regimes in the past were shaped by values that are dis-

appearing from our public teaching. The good, the true, and the beautiful are being replaced by the no-good, the “whatever,” and the valueless fodder of personal whim. Not surprisingly, many of our youth and adults are caught up in pornography, pagan piercing of body parts, self-serving pleasure pursuits, dishonest behavior, revealing attire, foul language, and degrading sexual indulgence.

An increasing number of opinion leaders and followers deny the existence of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and revere only the gods of secularism. Many in positions of power and influence deny the right and wrong defined by divine decree. Even among those who profess to believe in right and wrong, there are “them that call evil good, and good evil” (Isaiah 5:20; 2 Nephi 15:20). Many also deny individual responsibility and practice dependence on others, seeking, like the foolish virgins, to live on borrowed substance and borrowed light.

All of this is grievous in the sight of our Heavenly Father, who loves all of His children and forbids every practice that keeps any from returning to His presence.

Standing in holy places

What is the state of our personal preparation for eternal life? The people of God have always been people of covenant. What is the measure of our compliance with covenants, including the sacred promises we made in the waters of baptism, in receiving the holy priesthood, and in the temples of God? Are we promisers who do not fulfill and believers who do not perform?

Are we following the Lord’s command, “Stand ye in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold, it cometh quickly”? (D&C 87:8). What are those “holy places”? Surely they include the temple and its covenants faith-

fully kept. Surely they include a home where children are treasured and parents are respected. Surely the holy places include our posts of duty assigned by priesthood authority, including missions and callings faithfully fulfilled in branches, wards, and stakes.

The righteous need not fear

As the Savior taught in His prophecy of the Second Coming, blessed is the “faithful and wise servant” who is attending to his duty when the Lord comes (see Matthew 24:45–46). As the prophet Nephi taught of that day, “The righteous need not fear” (1 Nephi 22:17; see also 1 Nephi 14:14; D&C 133:44). And modern revelation promises that “the Lord shall have power over his saints” (D&C 1:36).

We are surrounded by challenges on all sides (see 2 Corinthians 4:8–9). But with faith in God, we trust the blessings He has promised those who keep His commandments. We have faith in the future, and we are preparing for that future. To borrow a metaphor from the familiar world of athletic competitions, we do not know when this game will end, and we do not know the final score, but we do know that when the game finally ends, our team wins. We will continue to go forward “till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done” (*History of the Church*, 4:540).

“Wherefore,” the Savior tells us, “be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom—For behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, that I come quickly” (D&C 33:17–18).

I testify of Jesus Christ. I testify that He shall come, as He has promised. And I pray that we will be prepared to meet Him, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.