

world would reach out and welcome it and embrace it as a vibrant testimony. It represents another great and basic contribution which came as a revelation to the Prophet [Joseph]" (in Conference Report, Apr. 2005, 84; or *Ensign*, May 2005, 82).

I pray that each of us will read the Book of Mormon by the end of the year in response to the challenge of our current

prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley, to honor the prophet of the Restoration, Joseph Smith. May we have a plan that we will follow in faith to taste and be filled with that which is of infinite and eternal value, even the word of God found in the Book of Mormon, is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Bishop Keith B. McMullin

Gospel provides answers to all problems

Have you ever found yourself in a conversation where you were suddenly required to remain silent while your point of view was misconstrued and belittled? Such a thing happened to me almost 25 years ago, and the frustration of that unfinished conversation has remained to this day.

As mission president, I had been invited, with others from the Church, to meet with the mayor of one of the cities in our mission. He was cordial as he welcomed us into his office. Our conversation touched upon concerns of the day. Eventually he asked why the Church was doing missionary work in his city.

This was not unexpected. An impression had come to me some weeks before that he would ask this question and what my response should be. I replied, "The gospel of Jesus Christ provides answers and solutions to all of the world's problems, including those confronting the good people of your city. This is why we are here."

I fully expected the mayor would want to know more. Instead, his mood changed. Skepticism then disdain took control of his countenance. He blustered about my naive approach to challenges in the world and brought our visit to an abrupt close. No further explanation was permitted.

This morning I should like to complete that conversation. I hope the good mayor

is listening because what follows is vital to a troubled world.

The gospel's teachings about calamities

We are sobered by the terrible calamities of recent years. They occur with increasing frequency and intensity. Natural forces are ferocious in their scope, human assaults are merciless in their carnage, and unchecked appetites are leading to licentiousness, crime, and family decay approaching epic proportions. The tsunami in southern Asia and hurricanes in the United States, with their terrible tolls, are the most recent calamities capturing our attention. Hearts and hands from around the world reach out to those so profoundly affected. For a brief period differences yield to compassion and love.

We are indebted to those who, when buffeted by calamities, remind us of man's dependence upon God. A widow in a refugee camp, anguishing over the brutal slaying of her sons, weeps the words, "I must not lose my faith." Survivors, overwhelmed by Katrina's fury, send out the plea, "Pray for us."¹

Causes of such calamities are the subject of seemingly endless debate. Commentators, politicians, scientists, and many others have opinions as to the causes.

The Lord Jesus Christ said concerning the restoration of His gospel:

“Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments; . . .

“Search these commandments, for they are true and faithful, and the prophecies and promises which are in them shall all be fulfilled.”²

Let us turn our attention to the reasons or purposes for such calamities. Fortunately, debate is not needed here because we have the fulness of Christ’s gospel on which we can rely. Search the words of the prophets in the Book of Mormon and the Bible; read the teachings of Jesus Christ in the 24th chapter of Matthew;³ study the Lord’s latter-day revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants.⁴ Herein we learn the purposes of God in such matters.

Adversity can bring us to the Savior

Calamities are a form of adversity, and adversity is a necessary part of Heavenly Father’s plan for the happiness of His children.

If our hearts are right before God, adversity will school us, help us overcome our carnal nature, and nurture the divine spark within us. Were it not for adversity, we would not know to “choose the better part.”⁵ Adversity helps us see where we need to repent, to bring into subjection baser instincts, to embrace righteousness and enjoy “peace of conscience.”⁶

The more we cleave unto righteousness, the more we enjoy the protecting care of our Savior. He is the Creator and Lord of the universe. He will calm the winds and the waves.⁷ His teachings and Atonement will heal the repentant soul. He is the Messiah or Deliverer, and because of Him, each of us can be in charge of his or her personal world, even as tragedies beset us. Listen to these truths:

“The Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of

men from the fall. And because that *they are redeemed* from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; *to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.*

“Wherefore, *men are free according to the flesh*; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for [the devil] seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.”⁸

We will do well to remember that the devil is the destroyer.

We each control our personal world

It is true that in this life we are only as free as our mortal circumstances allow. We may not be able to stay the course of war in distant lands or with our puny arm hold back the tempests that rage or run freely when our body is imprisoned by failing health. *But it is verily true that such things do not ultimately control our personal world. We do!*

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God.”⁹

And so, most honorable mayor, the gospel of Jesus Christ does provide answers to all of the world’s problems, *precisely because it provides solutions to the ills of every living soul.*

Every time calamity strikes, there is a corresponding sacred obligation that falls upon each of us to become better. We should ask ourselves, “What part of my life needs to change so that the weight of chastisement need not be felt?”

In the scriptures the Lord makes clear what He expects of us as such judgments descend. He says: “Gird up your loins and be prepared. Behold, the kingdom is yours, and the enemy shall not overcome.”¹⁰

Righteousness makes us strong, prepared

The Church and its members are commanded to be self-reliant and independent.¹¹ Preparation begins with faith, which enables us to weather vicissitudes as they come. We see earth life as a preparatory journey. Faith in the Lord and His gospel conquers fear and begets spirituality.

Spirituality grows as we “pray, and . . . walk uprightly before the Lord.”¹² It is “the consciousness of victory over self and of communion with the Infinite.”¹³

Faith, spirituality, and obedience produce a prepared and self-reliant people. As we obey the covenant of tithing, we are shielded from want and the power of the destroyer. As we obey the fast and give generously to care for others, our prayers are heard and family fidelity increases. Similar blessings come as we obey the counsel of the prophets and live within our means, avoid unnecessary debt, and set aside sufficient of life’s necessities to sustain ourselves and our families for at least a year. This may not always be easy, but let us do our “very best,”¹⁴ and our stores shall not fail—there shall be “enough and to spare.”¹⁵

And again the Lord says, “Be ye strong from henceforth; fear not, for the kingdom is yours.”¹⁶

Strength and resiliency come by righteous living. One is not righteous who is a saint on Sunday and a slacker the remainder of the week. Unchecked appetites are destructive and cause men to “trifle . . . with sacred things.”¹⁷ President Brigham Young taught, “The sin that will cleave to all the posterity of Adam and Eve is, that they have not done as well as they knew how.”¹⁸

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the pathway to righteousness. Tragedies never triumph where personal righteousness prevails. Let us, therefore, heed the counsel of the Apostle Paul:

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

“Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”¹⁹

Our grand millennial mission

Our duty as Latter-day Saints is to prepare ourselves, this earth, and its inhabitants for the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Being prepared and being strong as the gospel teaches ensure happiness here and hereafter and make this “grand millennial mission” possible.

Our beloved President Hinckley has admonished: “Now, my brethren and sisters, the time has come for us to stand a little taller, to lift our eyes and stretch our minds to a greater comprehension and understanding of the grand millennial mission of this, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is a season to be strong. It is a time to move forward without hesitation, knowing well the meaning, the breadth, and the importance of our mission. It is a time to do what is right regardless of the consequences that might follow. It is a time to be found keeping the commandments. It is a season to reach out with kindness and love to those in distress and to those who are wandering in darkness and pain. It is a time to be considerate and good, decent and courteous toward one another in all of our relationships—in other words, to become more Christlike.”²⁰

This admonition by the Lord's prophet points our way through these turbulent times. To all who suffer, our hearts reach out to you. May Heavenly Father, in His infinite mercy, make light your burdens and fill your lives with that peace which "passeth all understanding."²¹ You are not alone. Our love and faith and prayers are joined with yours. Press forward in righteousness, and all will be well.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Evan Thomas, "The Lost City," *Newsweek*, Sept. 12, 2005, 44.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 1:17, 37.
3. See also Joseph Smith—Matthew.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 45; 88; 101; 133.
5. "Father in Heaven, We Do Believe," *Hymns*, no. 180.
6. Mosiah 4:3.
7. See Matthew 8:25–27; Mark 4:39.
8. 2 Nephi 2:26–27; italics added.
9. *History of the Church*, 5:134–35.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 38:9.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 78:13–14; *Providing in the Lord's Way: A Leader's Guide to Welfare* (welfare handbook, 1990), 5.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 68:28.
13. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Oct. 1969, 8; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1969, 31.
14. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Standing Strong and Immovable," *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 10, 2004, 21.
15. Doctrine and Covenants 104:17.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 38:15.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 6:12.
18. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 89.
19. Romans 13:12–14.
20. In Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 95; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 71; see also Conference Report, Apr. 2005, 3; or *Ensign*, May 2005, 4.
21. Philippians 4:7.

The choir and congregation sang
"Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah."

Sister Susan W. Tanner

Eternal importance of our bodies

I have just returned from a visit where I welcomed into the world our newest little granddaughter, Elizabeth Claire Sandberg. She is perfect! I was awestruck, as I am each time a baby is born, with her fingers, toes, hair, beating heart, and distinctive family characteristics—nose, chin, dimples. Her older brothers and sister were equally excited and fascinated by their tiny, perfect little sister. They seemed to sense a holiness in their home from the presence of a celestial spirit newly united with a pure physical body.

In the premortal realm we learned that the body is part of God's great plan of happiness for us. As it states in the family proclamation, "Spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal

Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life" ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102). In fact, we "shouted for joy" to be part of this plan (Job 38:7).

Why were we so excited? We understood eternal truths about our bodies. We knew that our bodies would be in the image of God. We knew that our bodies would house our spirits. We also understood that our bodies would be subject to pain, illness, disabilities, and temptation. But we were willing, even eager, to accept these challenges because we knew that only with spirit and element inseparably connected could we progress to be-