

Lift Up Your Heart and Rejoice

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We were born at this time for a divine purpose, the gathering of Israel.

Speaking to Thomas B. Marsh, a recent convert, the Lord said encouragingly, “Lift up your heart and rejoice, for the hour of your mission is come” (Doctrine and Covenants 31:3).

I believe this invitation can serve as an inspiration for all members of the Church. After all, we have each received from our Heavenly Father the mission of gathering Israel on both sides of the veil.

“That gathering,” President Russell M. Nelson has said, “is the most important thing taking place on earth today. Nothing else compares in magnitude, nothing else compares in importance, nothing else compares in majesty.”¹

Certainly, there are many worthy causes in the world. It is impossible to name them all. But wouldn't you like to participate in a great cause within your reach and where your contribution makes a vital difference? The gathering makes an eternal difference to all. People of all ages can participate in this cause regardless of their circumstances and where they live. There is no other cause in the world more inclusive.

Speaking specifically to the youth, President Nelson said that “our Heavenly Father has reserved many of His most noble spirits—perhaps ... His finest team—for this final phase. Those noble spirits—those finest players, those heroes—are *you!*”²

Yes, you have been prepared from before this life and born now to participate in the great work of the gathering of Israel on both sides of the veil in these latter days (see Doctrine and Covenants 138:53–56).

Why is this cause so important? Because “the worth of souls is great in the sight of God” (Doctrine and Covenants 18:10). And because “whoso believeth in [Jesus Christ], and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and ... shall inherit the kingdom of God” (3 Nephi 11:33). Furthermore, “all that [the] Father hath shall be given unto” those who receive His ordinances and keep His covenants (Doctrine and Covenants 84:38). In addition, “the labourers are few” (Luke 10:2).

Only in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do we find the power, the authority, and the way to offer such a blessing to others, whether living or dead.

As President Nelson said: “*Anytime* you do *anything* that helps *anyone*—on either side of the veil—take a step toward making covenants with God and receiving their essential baptismal and temple ordinances, you are helping to gather Israel. It is as simple as that.”³

While there are many ways to help in the gathering, I would like to speak of one in particular: serving as a full-time missionary. For many of you, this will mean being a teaching missionary. For many others, it will mean being a service missionary. But the world tries to distract youth from this most sacred responsibility using fear and insecurities.

Some other distractions might be experiencing a pandemic, leaving a good job, putting off education, or being particularly interested in someone romantically. Everyone will have his or her own set of challenges. Such distractions can arise at precisely the time of embarking in the service of the Lord, and choices that seem obvious later are not always as easy in the moment.

I know from experience the troubled mind of such a young person. When I was preparing to go on my mission, some surprising forces tried to discourage me. One was my dentist. When he realized my appointment was so I could be a missionary, he tried to dissuade me from serving. I had not had the least notion that my dentist was against the Church.

The interruption of my education was also complicated. When I asked for a two-year leave of absence from my university program, I was informed that it was not possible. I would lose my place at the university if I did not return after one year. In Brazil, this was serious since the only criterion for admittance in a university program was a very difficult and competitive examination.

After repeatedly insisting, I was reluctantly informed that after being absent for one year, I could apply for an exception on extraordinary grounds. It might be approved or not. I was terrified at the idea of retaking that difficult admissions test after two years away from my studies.

I also was especially interested in a young woman. Several of my friends shared that same interest. I thought to myself, “If I go on a mission, I’m running a risk.”

But the Lord Jesus Christ was my great inspiration not to be afraid of the future as I strove to serve Him with all my heart.

He also had a mission to fulfill. In His own words, He explained, “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38). And was His mission easy? Of course not. His suffering, which was an essential part of His mission, caused Him, “even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that [He] might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—

“Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and [He] partook and finished [His] preparations unto the children of men” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:18–19).

Serving a full-time mission may seem difficult to us. Perhaps it requires that we give up important things for a moment. The Lord certainly knows this, and He will always be by our side.

In fact, in their message to missionaries in *Preach My Gospel*, the First Presidency promises, “The Lord will reward and richly bless you as you humbly and prayerfully serve Him.”⁴ It is true that all the children of God are blessed in one way or another, but there is a difference between being blessed and being richly blessed in His service.

Remember the challenges that I thought I faced prior to my mission? My dentist? I found another. My university? They made an exception for me. Remember that young woman? She married one of my good friends.

But God truly blessed me richly. And I learned that the blessings of the Lord can come in ways different from how we expect. After all, His thoughts are not our thoughts (see Isaiah 55:8–9).

Among the many rich blessings He has given me for serving Him as a full-time missionary are a greater faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement and a stronger knowledge and testimony of His teachings, so that I am not easily swayed by “every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). I lost my fear of teaching. My capacity to face challenges with optimism increased. By observing individuals and families I met or taught as a missionary, I learned that the teachings of God are true when He says that sin does not bring true happiness and that obedience to the commandments of God helps us prosper both temporally and spiritually (see Mosiah 2:41; Alma 41:10). And I learned for myself that God is a God of miracles (see Mormon 9).

All of these things were instrumental in my preparation for adult life, including possible marriage and parenthood, Church service, and professional and community life.

After my mission, I benefited from my increased courage to present myself as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ and His Church in all circumstances and to all people, even sharing the gospel with a beautiful woman who would become my virtuous, wise, fun, and beloved eternal companion, the sunshine of my life.

Yes, God has blessed me richly, far beyond what I imagined, just as He will all those who “humbly and prayerfully serve Him.” I am eternally grateful to God for His goodness.

My mission completely shaped my life. I learned it is worth the effort to trust in God, to trust in His wisdom and mercy and in His promises. After all, He is our Father, and without any doubt, He wants the best for us.

Dear youth throughout the world, I extend the same invitation that our prophet, President Nelson, has made to all of you “to enlist in the youth battalion of the

Lord to help gather Israel.” President Nelson said:

“There is *nothing* of greater consequence. Absolutely *nothing*.

“This gathering should mean *everything* to you. This *is* the mission for which you were sent to earth.”⁵

We were born at this time for a divine purpose, the gathering of Israel. When we serve as full-time missionaries, we will be challenged at times, but the Lord Himself is our great exemplar and guide in such circumstances. He understands what a difficult mission is. With His help, we can do hard things. He will be by our side (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:88), and He will bless us greatly as we humbly serve Him.

For all these reasons, I am not surprised that the Lord said to Thomas B. Marsh and to all of us, “Lift up your heart and rejoice, for the hour of your mission is come.” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), [HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.hopeofisrael.churchofjesuschrist.org).
2. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel.”
3. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel.”
4. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2019), v.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel.”