

When Shall These Things Be?

M. RUSSELL BALLARD

May I speak for everyone of you in extending our love and sympathy to Sister Lee, her children, and grandchildren upon the death of our dear friend and president Rex Lee. Thank you, Janet, for all that Rex and you have done for the Church and this great university. May the Lord bless you and yours now and always.

Sister Ballard and I are honored that President and Sister Bateman are here. I have learned many things from President Bateman, one of which is never miss a meeting. At the one meeting of the search committee that Bishop Bateman missed, we voted unanimously to submit his name to become president of this great university. You are so blessed to have him as your president.

I bring you greetings from the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles with special greetings from President Gordon B. Hinckley. His feelings for the young people of the Church are deep and profound, almost fatherly. He is vitally interested in your temporal and spiritual welfare, and he cares deeply about your eternal progression.

It is a sobering thing to prepare something meaningful to say to a congregation of enthusiastic young scholars. I can't help but be reminded of the story President Hinckley has

told of the police officer who came upon a man who was kneeling on the ground with his ear to the curb. The officer watched the man for a few minutes and then asked him, "What in the world are you doing?"

"I'm listening," the man replied.

So the policeman knelt down and put his ear to the curb. He listened for a couple of minutes, and then he said, "I can't hear anything."

"I know," the man replied. "It's been that way all day!"

I sincerely hope that you don't feel that way after I've concluded with my remarks.

Now, with the Lord's help, I would like to speak to you about a subject that is on a lot of people's minds. My intention is not to alarm or to frighten but to discuss the significant and interesting times in which we are now living, to consider some of the events and circumstances we can anticipate in the future, and to suggest a few things we can all do to fortify ourselves and our families for the challenges

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and trials that will surely come into all of our lives at one time or another.

Toward the end of the Savior's ministry, His disciples came to Him with several questions all centered around one key prophetic event: "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3).

Two thousand years ago, Christ's followers were concerned about that. Every generation of believers since then, I think, has been concerned about the last days to one degree or another. So the Lord's response to His disciples is meaningful to all of us. To the first question—"When shall these things be?"—He said, "Take heed that no man deceive you" (see Matthew 24:3–4). That is very significant.

For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. [Matthew 24:5–7]

I want to pause here for a moment and suggest to you, if you haven't been aware, that some of these things seem to be occurring with ever-increasing regularity. If you measured the natural disasters that have occurred in the world during the last ten years and plotted that year by year, you would see an acceleration.

The earth is rumbling, and earthquakes are occurring in "divers places." Human nature being what it is, we don't normally pay much attention to these natural phenomena until they happen close to where we are living. But when we contemplate what has happened during the past decade, not only with earthquakes but also with regard to hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, and the like, you would see an accelerating pattern.

So can we use this scientific data to extrapolate that the Second Coming is likely to occur during the next few years, or the next decade, or the next century? Not really. I am called as one of the apostles to be a special witness of Christ in these exciting, trying times, and I do not know when He is going to come again. As far as I know, none of my brethren in the Council of the Twelve or even in the First Presidency know. And I would humbly suggest to you, my young brothers and sisters, that if we do not know, then nobody knows, no matter how compelling their arguments or how reasonable their calculations. The Savior said that "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36).

I believe when the Lord says "no man" knows, it really means that no man knows. You should be extremely wary of anyone who claims to be an exception to divine decree. But while the exact timing of the Second Coming remains in doubt, there is no question that scriptural prophecy relative to that momentous and sacred event is being fulfilled, sometimes in remarkable ways.

For example, I would draw your attention to Matthew 24:8, where it reads: "All these [the things we have been speaking about so far] are the beginning of sorrows."

There are times in the Church when there is persecution—even violence on occasion. I have personally worked through the aftermath of violence against the Church and know that to establish the Church requires a great deal of dedication, hard work, and courage.

Continuing His discussion of His own Second Coming, Jesus said, "And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:10–11).

You may not be aware of it, but there are "false prophets" rising within and without the Church. They believe they have had

revelations, that they know something the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles don't know. You need to be very careful of such people. If you are ever approached by anyone who claims special authority or revelation from God outside the sustained priesthood authority, turn and run from them as fast as you can. The Savior said that in the last days even the very elect could be pulled away from the truth by such false prophets.

We have had some "false prophets" arise right here in the state of Utah. There are a few groups that have drifted away from the gospel under the direction of those who claim to have received special instruction through personal revelation, and some have declared themselves as prophets. I know of one group that is led by a bright, capable, articulate young man who claimed to receive a revelation that he is the prophet and that he was called of God to establish the true church. Sadly, there are those who have chosen to follow such individuals, who in turn lead them directly away from the principles of truth and righteousness.

Perhaps that is why it is so interesting to me that when the Master was asked about the signs of His Second Coming and the end of the world, he first responded by warning His listeners to beware of false prophets.

His next comment, found in verse 12, is similarly interesting: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). Think about what that means. Today we are living in a society in which many men and women see no real purpose in marriage. Common law relationships, in which people just live together without legally and lawfully making a formal commitment to one another through marriage, are escalating at an ever-increasing rate. In the United States the birthrate of children to unwed mothers is at an all-time high, as is the divorce rate.

In his book *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators*, William J. Bennett, former secretary of education, notes:

During the . . . 30-year period [1960–1990] there has been more than a 500 percent increase in violent crime; more than a 400 percent increase in illegitimate births; a tripling of the percentage of children living in single-parent homes; a tripling in the teenage suicide rate; a doubling in the divorce rate; and a drop of almost 75 points in SAT scores. . . .

[Today,] 30 percent of all births [are] illegitimate. . . .

By 2000, according to some projections, 40 percent of all American births . . . will occur out of wedlock. [The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), pp. 8, 47]

With so little of long-lasting, fully committed love in the world today, one would think you could turn to entertainment mediums to find a better, happier, more satisfying model for living. After all, history indicates there have always been storytellers and dramatists who encouraged their audiences with stories of a better world where maidens are fair, where princes are charming, and where everyone always lives happily ever after. Unfortunately, current entertainment forms tend to portray life even uglier and harsher than it really is. Movie critic Michael Medved laments the demise of larger-than-life heroes on film and television programs, claiming that we are now living in an age of "smaller-than-life anti-heroes." Sadly, one doesn't have to look far to find all manner of violence, ugliness, and illicit sexuality coming at us over the public airwaves. At the same time, wholesome, clean, uplifting, inspiring programs are few and far between. Hollywood and the television industry must be held accountable for their influence on America's social landscape, and I believe that influence is considerable.

I believe you cannot watch on film people gunned down in cold blood, in living color, and not have it affect the attitudes and thoughts of some of the people who see it. I believe you cannot continually portray human sexuality as

just another physical appetite that has to be satisfied—whenever and with whomever the urge strikes—without diminishing respect for God and His commandments. And I believe that the desensitizing effect of such media abuses on the hearts and souls of those who are exposed to them result in a partial fulfillment of the Savior’s statement that “because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12).

In order to keep the light and love of Christ burning in our hearts, we have to be careful in our choices of what we will watch and what we will read. Pornography is rampant and is absolutely, totally, completely destructive. Not too long ago I was assigned by the First Presidency to interview a man who had been excommunicated from the Church for adultery. It had required eight years for him to work his way through the long and sometimes painful process of reinstatement in the Church, and now he was sitting before me in an interview to determine his worthiness for a possible restoration of his priesthood and temple blessings. I asked him this simple question: “My dear brother, looking back on this traumatic time in your life, how did it happen?”

Tears began to flow freely down his cheeks as he tried to respond. At last he was able to speak. “Brother Ballard,” he said, “it all started the day I picked up a pornographic magazine in the barber shop. It was the first time in my life I had ever seen anything like that, and it intrigued me. I wanted to see more and more. And then I wanted to see things that were progressively more explicit. And then it wasn’t enough to just look at pictures—I wanted to actually participate in some of the activities I was looking at. Eventually I was untrue to my wife and my family and unfaithful to covenants I had made with my Heavenly Father in His holy house.”

The man continued through his tears: “I’m not trying to shift blame for the choices I made. I knew better than to do what I did, and I

alone am responsible for my sins. But there’s no question in my mind that exposure to pornography played a significant role in my spiritual decline.” And then he asked me: “When you talk to the brethren of the Church, please warn them. Please tell them to be careful about the things they read and watch.”

I’m not only going to tell you brethren that, I’m also going to extend that same warning to you sisters. All of you—please be vigilant in your entertainment choices. Some of the things that are being shown in our theaters and broadcast to our homes via television and videos and over the Internet are insidious and dangerous. Rather than falling within the scriptural admonition to seek after that which is “virtuous, lovely or of good report or praiseworthy” (Articles of Faith 1:13), they are more clearly described in chapter 7 of Moroni, where the prophet Mormon teaches that “whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God . . . is of the devil” (Moroni 7:17).

Now I’m aware that some of you may think that you know better than I do about this subject. And you will argue your case based on artistic merit or the fact that “everyone is seeing it,” or you will insist that you are not one of those people who will be influenced one way or the other by on-screen sex or violence.

To you I have only one question: Are you going to follow the true and living prophets or not? It really isn’t any more complicated than that. The standard of the Church with regard to morality is clearly outlined in the “For the Strength of Youth” pamphlet, which you haven’t outgrown, even though many of you are no longer in Young Men and Young Women. If you choose to read anything that contains material that is contrary to the moral standards of the Church, then you are placing yourself and your own wisdom above the counsel of God’s prophets—a course of action that would indeed be very unwise. As soon as people begin to think that they know better

than God or his oracles, or that counsel given doesn't apply to themselves, they are stepping onto a slippery slope that has claimed far too many victims already. It takes faith—real faith, unequivocal and unreserved—to accept and attempt to live by prophetic counsel even when you don't completely understand it. Such simple faith has the power to guide you safely through every challenge you may face in your life.

Last month I spoke at the funeral of one of my righteous senior missionaries. As I thought about his life, I realized that he had captured the ability to believe because of his simple faith in the words of the Lord and the words of the Lord's servants. This willingness to believe and live the gospel prepared my friend to meet the Savior as a "good and faithful servant."

Of course, Lucifer doesn't want us to feel or exhibit that kind of faith, and so he makes us feel uncomfortable with obedience. He plants defiance in our hearts with justification and rationalization, subtly convincing us that it is possible to live the spirit of the law even if we are in violation of its letter. Eventually he can make it seem wrong—or at least politically incorrect—to obey, branding it with derogatory labels like "blind faith." But we must never forget this about Lucifer: He is a liar. He is the father of all lies and has been from the beginning. He was cast out of Heavenly Father's premortal kingdom because of his disobedience, and now he has one goal, one eternal commitment that has never changed from the time of the War in Heaven until the present day. His sole purpose is to make you and me as miserable as he is, and the best way for him to accomplish that is to entice us into disobedience.

Although there are all kinds of misery in this world, the only kind that is eternal is misery of the soul. And that kind of misery is centered in sin and transgression. Be careful; stay morally clean in mind and body. Do not compromise the standards of chastity.

When we are not doing what we know we ought to be doing and when we are not living the way we know we ought to live, we have a tendency to be unhappy. And make no mistake about it, we know when we are not doing what we ought to do because every one of us here has a conscience. We are born with the Spirit of Christ, and we know instinctively what is right and what is wrong when it comes to our personal behavior. It offends that spirit when we allow ourselves and our values and standards to be manipulated by aesthetic propaganda in behalf of Satan's lies.

Consider the following words from the apostle Paul in connection with much of what we see and hear in contemporary media:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,

Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. [2 Timothy 3:1–7]

Now, please don't misunderstand. I'm not trying to say that all of film or television or publishing or music is evil, because you and I both know that that is simply not true. There is much that is good in the media, and it can be a wondrous and marvelous thing and a blessing in our lives. But some of it is evil; there can be no other word to describe it.

This is the time, brothers and sisters, to make our voices heard. In the media today, as

we would look at it from any vantage point, I think we would have to say that Lucifer's influence has a far more dominant influence than has the Lord's. We are in a war. This war is the same war that raged in the premortal world. Lucifer and his followers are committed in their evil direction. Our Heavenly Father and his beloved Son Jesus Christ have given a plan for our Heavenly Father's children, and we have the responsibility as leaders and members of the Church to take this glorious plan of Heavenly Father's to all of His children throughout the world. It is my judgment that much success will come as we become more expert and more able to harness the wonderful technology that our Heavenly Father has given to man to proclaim His message.

In Shakespeare's time, he was limited generally to the Globe Theatre, but we now have a global theater. As our opportunities widen with modern satellites, computers, fiber optics, and the Internet, the doors to the world are literally opened wide. Upon your shoulders will soon rest the responsibility to teach the world that God's way is the only way to find peace, joy, and happiness. Returning to chapter 24 of Matthew, verses 13–14:

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

I hope you are all aware of what is happening in terms of missionary work around the world. In the past six years we have carried the gospel to thirty-nine new countries. Did you know that? Are you keeping score, so to speak? This work is moving; it is beginning to cover the earth. While it is true that many of our Heavenly Father's children have never had the opportunity to hear the message of the Restoration, it's also true that the circumstances preventing them from receiving the gospel

could quickly change—just as it did in eastern Europe. Who would have dreamed a decade ago that the Iron Curtain would be gone, almost overnight? It was remarkable—even miraculous—and today our missionaries are teaching the gospel where for fifty years we were prohibited from establishing a gospel presence. So it is happening, my brothers and sisters. Christ's gospel is going to all the world. Be alert! Be aware! Stay awake! Now to verses 23 and 24:

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Now listen to verse 26:

Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. [Matthew 24:23–24, 26]

The Savior is telling his followers that one of the great signs of the times will be false prophets and false Christs. We've already spoken of this to some extent, but let me add this thought. We all witnessed the terrible tragedy in Waco, Texas, several years ago. Mr. Koresh had convinced those who lived in his compound that he was the Messiah. There are people all around the world who are now making the declaration that they are the Christ. Please be careful.

You keep your eyes riveted on the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. We will not lead you astray. We cannot. Let me tell you why. Every week that I am in town, I attend a meeting of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve on the fourth floor of the Salt Lake Temple. If you could see the process by which decision and

direction comes from that meeting, you would have a deep sense of confidence and comfort that the will of the Lord is being taught by the leaders of the Church. So keep your eyes riveted on the leadership of the Church. While individuals may falter, the body of general Church leadership will remain steadfast and true. If someone tells you that they have received revelation that the First Presidency and the Twelve have not received, run away from them.

Now, I want to talk to you about one other matter before closing. One of my missionaries came to me some time ago. He was a fine missionary. I asked him, "Elder, how can I help you?"

"President," he said, "I think I'm losing my testimony."

I couldn't believe it. I asked him how that could be possible.

"For the first time I have read some anti-Mormon literature," he said. "I have some questions, and nobody will answer them for me. I am confused, and I think I am losing my testimony."

I asked him what his questions were, and he told me. They were the standard anti-Church issues, but I wanted a little time to gather materials so I could provide meaningful answers. So we set up an appointment ten days later, at which time I told him I would answer everyone of his questions. As he started to leave, I stopped him.

"Elder, you've asked me several questions here today," I said. "Now I have one for you."

"Yes, President?"

"How long has it been since you read from the Book of Mormon?" I asked.

His eyes dropped. He looked at the floor for a while. Then he looked at me. "It's been a long time, President," he confessed.

"All right," I said. "You have given me my assignment. It's only fair that I give you yours. I want you to promise me that you will read in the Book of Mormon for at least one hour every

day between now and our next appointment." He agreed that he would do that.

Ten days later he returned to my office, and I was ready. I pulled out my papers to start answering his questions. But he stopped me.

"President," he said, "that isn't going to be necessary." Then he explained, "I know that the Book of Mormon is true. I know Joseph Smith is a prophet of God."

"Well, that's great," I said, "but you're going to get answers to your questions anyway. I worked a long time on this, so you just sit there and listen."

And so I answered all of those questions, and then asked, "Elder, what have you learned from this?"

And he said, "Give the Lord equal time."

Now, my young brothers and sisters, you engrave that thought on your minds and carry it with you as you walk through this process of mortality. Give the Lord equal time. Give Him His due share of your thoughts, your time, your talent, and your attention. I know that you're all very busy with school and work and social responsibilities. This is a critical time in your lives when you are establishing a foundation for your families and your careers. There are many demands for your attention, and your time is limited by a wide variety of constraints. But as you learn to manage your time, be sure that you give the Lord His portion. Establish a time and place to study the scriptures on a daily basis, even if it's only for a few minutes at a time. Pray regularly. Serve faithfully in whatever capacity a call is extended, including home and visiting teaching, which is the very essence of gospel service. Those of you who are beginning your families, start now—even when your children are infants—to hold weekly, meaningful family home evenings where gospel lessons are taught and pleasant family activities are shared. In the great scheme of things, these things take so little time. But the long-term

benefits to you and to your families are infinite and eternal, and they will do much to prepare you and your children for the steadily increasing challenges of the future.

And that's really what we're talking about this morning, my young brothers and sisters. These are the last days. As has been foretold by God's holy prophets since the world began, they are challenging times, and they are going to become even more challenging. So wherein is our safety? Where is our peace? Where is our joy? Where is our inner security?

My testimony to you is that safety, peace, joy, and security are found only in the life and mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of Almighty God. Bringing people to Him is the sum and substance of our ministry. So we embrace His teachings, we give up all of our sins, we repent, we do all that is in our power to do to come unto Him in a true spirit of discipleship, knowing perfectly well that it is through His grace that we are saved, even after all that we can do. And as we give ourselves to Christ, fully and completely, we find safety, peace, joy, and security in Him.

Does that mean we will not have turmoil or personal problems or sickness or family challenges or employment difficulties? Not at all. But it does mean that if our faith is anchored securely in our testimonies of Christ, we will be able to cope with whatever adversity comes our way, and we will be able to do so in a positive, faith-promoting manner. If we keep the eye of faith focused on Christ, we gain a broader view and an eternal perspective, and with that we can understand adversity from within the context of Heavenly Father's eternal plan for all of His children. And we can find comfort in this life in the eternal safety, peace, joy, and security that He promises.

Not too long ago I attended a missionary fireside in Idaho, after which I was introduced to a beautiful eighteen-year-old young woman who was fighting a battle with cancer. I was

told that for the third time her cancer had come out of remission, and I was asked if it would be possible for me to give her a blessing. The family were converts to the Church, and her father said, "Brother Ballard, we are aware that our daughter is in the hands of Heavenly Father, and we're not asking you to do anything that would be contrary to His mind and will. We just want to feel that we've done everything we possibly can to appeal to Him for her life."

Of course I understood. Any parent would understand that feeling. We went into a private room where I was able to visit with this extraordinary young woman for a few minutes. I wish I could communicate to you the sweet and wonderful spirit that I felt from her. This beautiful young woman looked into my eyes and with powerful simplicity said, "Brother Ballard, I'm not afraid to die. I would like to live. There are things that I would still like to accomplish in this life. But I know that Jesus is my Savior and my Redeemer, and during these past few years He has become my best friend. I trust Him, and I trust you as His representative. Whatever He wants for me, I'm prepared."

We gave her a blessing, during which we pled with God for a miracle, but at her request left the matter with Heavenly Father. My wife Barbara was with me, and as we returned to our car we looked at each other with tears in our eyes as we said to one another, "Oh, thank heavens for the gospel. Thank heavens for a plan that makes it possible for an eighteen-year-old girl to know what it means to come unto Christ. What ever happens, she is going to be fine." She died on June 23, 1995, with the peace of the Lord accompanying her and her family.

That's the blessed assurance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is His Church, the only true and living Church upon the face of the whole earth. You stay anchored to it. Don't you let any voice or any wind of doctrine or any secret, so-called revelation or any special information that "the Brethren don't understand" lead you away

from what you know to be true. Our safety, brothers and sisters, our peace—our inner peace—the peace that we all seek, lies in striving to live as the Savior would want us to live and in knowing within our hearts and minds that we are doing the best we can to try to keep His commandments.

Of course, such discipleship comes at a price. It isn't always easy to come to Christ. There are sacrifices that need to be made by all who seek to follow the Savior, and sometimes those sacrifices are quite painful. To be called by God to serve Him in any capacity is the greatest honor a person can have, and we all do it willingly and with all our hearts because we love Him and we love His Son. Let us accept Their teachings, strive to understand Them, and strive to put sin out of our lives through repentance and to honor Them

through our own righteous living. Let us always follow the inspired leadership of the Church, which includes the inspired leadership of this university.

I leave you my witness and my testimony, my beloved young people at this great university. Jesus Christ is the Son of God; He does live; this is His church. May our Heavenly Father bless each and every one of you, fortify your testimonies, and cradle you in the beauties of the gospel that nothing will come into your lives that will take you away from the marvelous truths that we have in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. May this be your blessing. Thank you for who you are, for all that you are doing and will yet do in the building of the kingdom of God. This is my humble prayer and testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.