

# *The Lord Has a Work for You to Do*

M. RUSSELL BALLARD

**I**t is a tremendous blessing to be with you in the first month of a new century, the start of a new millennium. Notwithstanding any difficulties or challenges you may face in the coming years, I am confident you can look forward to unsurpassed opportunities for learning, growth, and service. It is an exciting time to be alive and to be a participant in building the kingdom of God. The Lord has a work for each of you to do, and we meet this morning in His name, knowing that all that is said and done is to honor Him. I pray for His spirit to direct my remarks.

Do you remember what President Gordon B. Hinckley said about this new millennium in last October's general conference?

*The centuries have passed. The latter-day work of the Almighty, that of which the ancients spoke, that of which the prophets and apostles prophesied, is come. It is here. For some reason unknown to us, but in the wisdom of God, we have been privileged to come to earth in this glorious age. . . .*

*We stand on the summit of the ages, awed by a great and solemn sense of history. This is the last and final dispensation toward which all in the past has pointed. I bear testimony and witness of the reality and truth of these things. . . .*

*. . . Say good-bye to a millennium. Greet the beginning of another thousand years.*

*And so we shall go forward on a continuing path of growth and progress and enlargement, touching for good the lives of people everywhere. [Gordon B. Hinckley, "At the Summit of the Ages," Ensign, November 1999, 74]*

Twenty-two years ago I spoke at this devotional about the great need the world and the Church would have for prepared leaders. I repeat a similar message to you because the need for strong leaders is even greater today. Let me begin by helping you to understand the work the Lord has for you to do. I need to review with you some of the highlights in the development of the Church that occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries and then preview for you some of the exciting growth and opportunities for service you may expect as we enter the 21st century. First, let us look at the world as it was 100 years ago.

In January 1900 Lorenzo Snow was serving as president of the Church at 85 years of age. The previous year, during a visit to St. George, President Snow was inspired to give a powerful

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*M. Russell Ballard is a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This devotional address was given at BYU on 18 January 2000.*

emphasis to the Church concerning the payment of tithing. Then in 1900 he sent one of the last of the wagon trains to the Big Horn Basin of northern Wyoming, asking 100 families to leave familiar surroundings to establish new homes there. As the age of wagon trains was ending, the automobile and aviation age was beginning. It was in 1903 that Wilbur and Orville Wright became the first men to fly.

In April conference of 1900, President Lorenzo Snow commented on the growth of the Church to that point. He said:

*Seventy years ago this Church was organized with six members. We commenced, so to speak, as an infant. . . .*

*. . . But now we are pretty well along to manhood. . . .*

*The Lord has prospered us amazingly, and we are doing large things at the present time. We are blessing the people of the world. We are sending . . . two thousand Elders out into the missionary field. . . .*

*Now that we are approaching our seventy-first year, the Lord expects that we will do something—something that will cause the nations to marvel, as what we have done has caused them already to wonder. [Lorenzo Snow, CR, April 1900, 1–2]*

The Church began the 20th century with 271,681 members in 40 stakes. Four temples were in operation: St. George, Logan, Manti, and Salt Lake. The 2,000 missionaries described by President Snow were serving in 18 missions in 20 nations and four territories. The Prophet Joseph Smith's vision of the destiny of this Church was beginning to be fulfilled.

It was early in 1834 that a meeting was called by the Prophet Joseph in Kirtland, Ohio. At this time the Saints living in Missouri were suffering great persecutions. The Prophet had announced the intention to go to Missouri and had enlisted a number of volunteers to go as Zion's Camp to rescue the Saints there. Wilford Woodruff gave a vivid description of the

Prophet's message to the elders who met in preparation for the Zion's Camp march:

*On Sunday night the Prophet called on all who held the priesthood to gather into the little log school house they had there. It was a small house, perhaps 14 feet square. But it held the whole of the priesthood of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who were then in the town of Kirtland, and who had gathered together to go off in Zion's Camp. . . . When we got together the Prophet called upon the elders of Israel with him to bear testimony of this work. . . . When they got through the Prophet said, "Brethren, I have been very much edified and instructed in your testimonies here tonight, but I want to say to you before the Lord, that you know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother's lap. You don't comprehend it." . . . He said, "It is only a little handful of priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world." [Wilford Woodruff, CR, April 1898, 57; punctuation and spelling modernized]*

In the earliest years of the development of the Church, at a time when its enemies already were making great efforts to stop the work, the Prophet knew that no enemy, present or future, would have sufficient power to frustrate and stop the purposes of God. Even Joseph's closest associates in those early years did not understand that this Church would roll forth from small beginnings to fill the entire world as prophesied by the Old Testament prophet Daniel (see Daniel 2).

You may remember that the Articles of Faith first appeared in a letter that Joseph Smith wrote to Mr. John Wentworth, the editor of a Chicago newspaper. In the Wentworth letter, which was dated 1 March 1842, Joseph Smith wrote a vision of the destiny of this Church in a profound prophecy. He wrote:

*The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhalloved hand can stop the work from progressing;*

*persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.* [HC 4:540]

As early missionaries of the Church, both Wilford Woodruff and Lorenzo Snow had helped erect the Lord's standard of truth. Lorenzo Snow had been a member of the Church for less than a year when he set out on his first mission in 1837. He told about his first experience preaching the gospel in the following words:

*I . . . traveled about thirty miles, and just as the sun was setting I made my first call for a night's lodging, as a "Mormon" Elder, and was refused; then another, and so on, until the eighth call, when I was admitted to a night's lodging—going to bed supperless, and leaving in the morning, minus a breakfast.*

*The first meeting I held was in the neighborhood of my uncle, by the name of Goddard, near the county seat of Medina County, Ohio. The people were notified and a respectable congregation assembled. It was a sore trial to face that audience in the capacity of a preacher, but I believed and felt an assurance that a Spirit of inspiration would prompt and give me utterance. . . .*

*. . . I baptized and confirmed into the Church my uncle, aunt and several of my cousins.* [Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow, comp. Eliza R. Snow Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, 1884), 16]

Lorenzo Snow knew the Lord had a work for him to do. He and other early missionaries succeeded in the face of all opposition because they had the unwavering faith and courage to lead out in declaring the truth of the restored gospel by the power of the Spirit of the Lord.

Wilford Woodruff was also given a great work to do because of his faith in Jesus Christ

and his willingness to submit to the will of the Lord. In 1840 Wilford Woodruff was sent as a missionary to England. He had been tutored by the Prophet Joseph Smith and was later ordained an apostle. The success of his missionary work in southern England in 1840 may be unparalleled. The following extract comes from his journal:

*In the morning I went in secret before the Lord, and asked Him what was His will concerning me. The answer I received was that I should go to the south; for the Lord had a great work for me to perform there, as many souls were waiting for His word.* [Wilford Woodruff, ed. Matthias F. Cowley (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 116]

Wilford Woodruff followed the directions he received from the Lord and was led by the Spirit to the farm of John Benbow in Herefordshire, a region in the south of England where no Latter-day Saint missionary had visited. The Benbows accepted the gospel and soon introduced Wilford Woodruff to a group of 600 people called the United Brethren (see Woodruff, 116–19). This group had been searching for the truth and had been "calling upon the Lord continually to open the way before them" (Woodruff, 117). Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal:

*The first thirty days after my arrival in Herefordshire, I had baptized forty-five preachers and one hundred and sixty members of the United Brethren, who put into my hands one chapel and forty-five houses, which were licensed according to law to preach in. This opened a wide field for labor, and enabled me to bring into the Church, through the blessings of God, over eighteen hundred souls during eight months, including all of the six hundred United Brethren except one person.* [Woodruff, 119]

Last November 11, Sister Ballard and I, in company with Elder and Sister Spencer Condie, visited the Benbow farm, where we stood by the pond where Wilford Woodruff performed many of those baptisms. I had such a profound

reverence and feeling of appreciation for this great leader. I thought to myself, “Elder Ballard, are you measuring up to the example of courageous leadership of the faithful first apostles of this last dispensation?” Many of you young men and women will someday be called to leadership responsibilities, and you may well ponder the same question: Are you living up to the example of those who preceded you in your stake, ward, or general Church callings?

On this same trip we visited the Gadfield Elm chapel that is being restored through the good work of the British Saints. This is the oldest chapel in the Church, a building where Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, and Willard Richards preached.

Again, the reflection back to those great leaders caused me to wonder, “Am I a leader worthy to stand among those early Brethren and feel secure in how I have handled my leadership responsibilities?” Brothers and sisters, please learn from me today that among those of you present, many will be called to positions of leadership in the Church in future years. You must prepare now so you will be ready in every way to lead with courage and faith.

Because of the great faith of Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, and other missionaries and because of their ability to follow the promptings of the Spirit, the truth of God began to sweep the nations and sound in many ears.

All of us need to remember that when we enter into the work of the Lord and choose to pursue a course that can bring about great good, we may expect, like Lorenzo Snow and Wilford Woodruff, to encounter some opposition, difficulties, or trials. This is not only because the adversary is very real, but also because such experiences help prepare us to become courageous and wise leaders.

In the past century, the truth of God has continued to go forth nobly as Joseph Smith prophesied. On September 3, 1925, President Heber J. Grant announced that the First Presidency had decided to open missionary

work in South America. Following the Lord’s pattern for unlocking the door of the kingdom in all nations (see D&C 112:16–17, 19), the First Presidency called my grandfather, Elder Melvin J. Ballard, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, with Rulon S. Wells and Rey L. Pratt of the First Council of the Seventy, to go to South America. They were called to dedicate that land for the preaching of the gospel, to open a mission there, and to lay the foundation for establishing the Church in that vast continent. After a three-week journey by ship, covering more than 7,000 miles, the three missionaries arrived in Buenos Aires in December 1925.

On Christmas morning of 1925, at 7:00 a.m., Elder Ballard dedicated the land. The missionary work was slow and difficult in those early months. Of the 16 people attending the first Church meeting, almost all were German immigrants. In the first 10 months while grandfather was there, the missionaries saw only a small handful of converts join the Church; perhaps only one or two of them were native Latin people. In spite of this, the spiritual sensitivity of Elder Melvin J. Ballard caused him to make this remarkable prophecy:

*The work of the Lord will grow slowly for a time here just as an oak grows slowly from an acorn. It will not shoot up in a day as does the sunflower that grows quickly and then dies. But thousands will join the Church here. It will be divided into more than one mission and will be one of the strongest in the Church. The work here is the smallest that it will ever be. The day will come when the Lamanites in this land will be given a chance. The South American Mission will be a power in the Church. [Melvin J. Ballard—Crusader for Righteousness (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 84]*

And as you are aware, brothers and sisters, there has been remarkable growth in the Church in South America.

Beginning in 1930, national attitudes toward members of the Church started to change. We

entered a new stage under the leadership of President Heber J. Grant. Radio began carrying throughout the country broadcasts of the Tabernacle Choir. The Church's welfare system received national attention, and the press became more positive than negative.

In the decade of the 1960s, President David O. McKay's slogan "Every member a missionary" became a household theme. As members of the Church responded to President McKay's inspired leadership and counsel, they shared the gospel with more nonmember neighbors and associates. The pace of missionary work accelerated.

During the four decades from 1930 to 1970, there were 106,799 full-time missionaries set apart. Worldwide Church membership increased fourfold from 663,000 to 2,807,456. More than one million new members were added just in the decade of the 1960s. One hundred and four stakes developed into 630 stakes. By 1970, missionaries were serving in 43 nations and nine territories. During this 40-year period, the South American nations of Uruguay, Paraguay, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela were opened to missionary work. Church leaders reopened missionary work in Chile. In Central America, servants of the Lord unlocked the nations of Panama, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. In Asia, major new efforts began to bear fruit in Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and the Philippines.

President Spencer W. Kimball led the Church to new heights in carrying the gospel to the people of the world. The Church called many more missionaries, and a greatly increased number of missionaries from their native lands were enlisted in the work. President Kimball called for a widened vision of the work and asked members of the Church to lengthen their stride in moving the gospel across the face of the earth. He called upon the Church to use all of the media—newspapers, magazines, television, and radio—in their greatest power to

convey the gospel message to unreached millions throughout the earth.

During the 15 years from 1970 to the end of 1985 when President Kimball died, 230,195 missionaries were set apart to serve full-time missions—more than double the number set apart in the preceding 40 years. Worldwide Church membership grew from 2,807,456 to 5,919,481—three million additional members. The number of stakes increased from 630 to 1,582. Missionary work was opened or reopened in many countries, including India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Micronesia, Kiribati, and other island nations in the Caribbean and Pacific.

Then, during the nine years that President Ezra Taft Benson presided over the Church—that would be from 1985 to 1994—there was further fulfillment of prophecy. It was in this period that the Iron Curtain came down and the Berlin Wall fell. The Lord unlocked the doors so missionaries could serve in Russia, the Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, and other nations that had been behind the Iron Curtain. The Lord's servants also opened many nations of Africa, including Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana, Zaire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, and Ivory Coast. Many others have been opened and will be opened to the preaching of the gospel in the future. Conversion miracles have happened in many lands, and I just share with you one example from my own ministry.

During the last week of January 1988, 12 years ago, the First Presidency sent me to Lima, Peru, where we had 11 stakes of the Church. Because of the rapid and healthy growth of the Church in that city, I and the area presidency had the privilege of organizing seven additional stakes in one weekend to make a total of 18 stakes. We held six stake conferences, all of which I attended, being shuttled very rapidly from place to place by a native who knew the roads of Lima. I truly saw Joseph Smith's and Melvin J. Ballard's prophecies being fulfilled.

In the continent of South America, the one mission organized in 1925 has now been divided into 69. The 16 people present at the original Church meeting now have multiplied into more than 1,800,000 members organized into 560 stakes of Zion. The three missionaries who arrived in Buenos Aires in 1925 have swelled into an army of over 12,000. (That's just in South America.) Five temples are now in operation, with seven more under construction.

As we begin the 21st century, we truly stand on the shoulders of the spiritual giants who have preceded us as great leaders. Just as the early Saints were led 100 years ago, we are led by a mighty prophet filled with faith and great vision. President Gordon B. Hinckley will be 90 this year and is blessed with strength and energy to lead the Lord's work in all nations and to personally travel the earth to teach and testify of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Church begins the year 2000 with 10,700,000 members in 2,542 stakes. With just a little over a quarter million members and 40 stakes in 1900, Church membership has multiplied nearly 40 times, and the number of stakes is more than 60 times greater. During the past century the missionary force has grown from 2,000 in 18 missions to approximately 59,000 serving in 333 missions. The missionary outreach has increased from 21 nations and four territories to 121 nations and 21 territories. In just the past 10 years we have reached 35 additional nations that had been closed to the Church. The Lord's Church has wards or branches in another 41 nations that do not yet have full-time missionaries. Because of the courageous, inspired leadership of President Gordon B. Hinckley and the faithful payment of tithing by the members of the Church, we now have 69 temples in operation around the world and 46 more temples that have been announced or are under construction. We will have 100 temples dedicated by the end of this year. As you know, President Hinckley is interested in that.

The kingdom of God has developed worldwide in a miraculous manner because leaders, members, and missionaries entered into the Lord's work with humility, faith, and courage. Today we continue to face opposition, and we can expect it to accelerate as we endeavor to move this great work forward. Nevertheless, we see the fulfillment of Joseph Smith's prophecy that "the truth of God will go forth . . . till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear" (HC 4:540).

With our united faith and efforts and your preparation to become leaders, this Latter-day miracle will continue in this century. Based on past growth rates of the Church, we can project a Church membership of 20 million by 2020 and 50 million by the year 2040. A membership of 50 million would mean more than 11,000 stakes and 130,000 wards and branches. Rodney Stark, a prominent non-Mormon social scientist who has studied the growth of the Church, projects that LDS membership will reach as much as 260 million by 2080 (Rodney Stark, "So Far, So Good: A Brief Assessment of Mormon Membership Projections," *Review of Religious Research* 38, no. 2 [December 1996]: 175). Some of you will still be alive. You won't be much good, but you'll be alive.

Who will manage this amazing growth and provide the leadership to bless the Lord's children? Who will keep pace with the exploding fields of technology? We had a remarkable presentation by President Bateman to the board of education just this past week, and what is happening on this campus with technology is overwhelming. Who's going to keep up with it? Who will know the doctrine and keep it pure? Brothers and sisters, it is your generation that will have this responsibility. In the wisdom of God, there is a reason that you are living at this time as we welcome a new century.

Each one of you is very dear to the Lord. He knows you, and He loves you. Today, as one of the Lord's apostles, I charge you to prepare

spiritually and in every other way to be prepared for the important work ahead for you to do. The Lord could well say to you as he said to Moses: "I have a work for thee, . . . my son; and thou art in the similitude of mine Only Begotten; and mine Only Begotten is and shall be the Savior" (Moses 1:6). You, too, are made in the likeness of the Savior, and He invites you, as sons and daughters of God, to prepare spiritually to enter into His work. It will require your full energy, clear thinking, best efforts, and utmost faith.

Your mission from the Lord will be unfolded to you day by day as you pray, search the scriptures, and diligently give of yourself in the Lord's work. You will come to know your work from the Lord more and more as you submit cheerfully to His will. Remember that it is small acts of service and devotion that bring about great things. The Lord said: "Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great" (D&C 64:33).

Make this year, this month, this day a new starting point in your life. The Prophet Joseph Smith stated, "If we start right, it is easy to go right all the time; but if we start wrong, we may go wrong, and it [will] be a hard matter to get right" (*Teachings*, 343). Joseph Smith used this statement to talk about the importance of starting with a correct understanding of God. But it may be applied to the new beginning you have the opportunity of making in your life today. If there is anything in your life that you need to repent of, then I call upon you in the name of the Lord to repent today. Why? Because we need you as faithful, courageous, and prepared leaders.

In closing, let me share a special experience that Sister Ballard and I had in connection with

the announcement of the new PBS television presentation *American Prophet: The Story of Joseph Smith*. We were assigned to meet with the Vermont PBS leaders and others in Sharon, Vermont, the birthplace of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Time allowed us to visit the homestead of Joseph Smith, Sr., and Lucy Mack Smith in Tunbridge. Researchers have now found the location of the humble cabin in which my mother's great-grandfather Hyrum Smith was born. His brothers Alvin and Samuel and his sister Sophronia were also born in Tunbridge. Can you sense the profound feelings of humility and wonder that came into my heart as I stood at this special site? Two hundred years ago, on February 9, 1800, Hyrum came into this world, destined to become one of the most important and magnificent leaders of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. From very humble beginnings came the leadership power of Joseph, Hyrum, and many others.

In contrast to that experience, on the seventh of this month, with several of the Brethren, I toured the magnificent new conference center, where 21,000 people will gather in April to attend general conference. From the humble beginnings in Vermont to the great conference center in Salt Lake City, tremendous progress has been made. We must never forget the price paid by the courageous, faithful leaders who had testimonies deeply rooted in the doctrine. They faithfully accepted the challenges of leadership. Our appreciation for their service is best shown by you and me in our willingness to prepare to do our part now and in the future.

I leave you my witness that Jesus Christ lives. He presides and directs this marvelous work. Great blessings await those who prepare now to lead the Church tomorrow. Of this I humbly testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.