

He Hath Given a Law Unto All Things

L. TOM PERRY

I listen with great interest to your president's instructions on what to do at a ball game. President, I see that you follow that counsel, but it should be expanded just a little. I noticed on one call last night that you said, "Oh! Oh! Oh, no!"

I wanted to add my tribute to these great athletes, the cross-country and the football teams. I had the experience this year of returning to my alma mater and watching a football game at Logan for the first time, I guess, since I graduated. I grew up in a most remarkable family: my father graduated from the University of Utah, my mother started her college career at Brigham Young College, and all their children went to Utah State. That means every time there has been an athletic contest involving Utah teams it has always been a period of unusual excitement among our family. I want you to know, however, that I have really been converted—I sat on the BYU side in Logan and didn't cheer once for the Aggies. Stake presidents that have been with me when a football game is going on during a stake conference session on Saturday afternoon have always wondered why all the notes come to me during the meeting. I always have someone out in a car listening to the game to pass me the score every time it changes.

The fall season of 1977 has had the General Authorities encouraging the membership of the Church to become more involved in missionary service. As part of our Saturday evening session of stake conferences, we have shown the film, *Go Ye into All the World*. The film has presented President Kimball instructing us in our missionary responsibilities; and his vision, as he explains the growth of the kingdom, has touched me deeply. In this film he states, "The Lord will place in our hands inventions which will almost be impossible for us to comprehend," and, "Who can say what other miracles the Lord has prepared for us?"

Each time I hear these statements, I am thrilled with the vision of our Prophet. In a reflective mood and thinking of his prophetic statements, I was reading the Doctrine and Covenants the other night. In the 88th section these words stood out:

L. Tom Perry was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 29 November 1977.

He comprehendeth all things, and all things are before him, and all things are round about him; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things; and all things are by him, and of him, even God forever and ever.

And again, verily I say unto you, he hath given a law unto all things, by which they move in their times and their seasons;

And their courses are fixed, even the courses of the heavens and the earth, which comprehend the earth and all the planets. [D&C 88:41–43]

I marvel, as I am privileged to study God's dealings with mankind, at how remarkably he has paved the way and provided the means for his children to learn of his ways. I would like to walk you through just a brief period of history today with the objective of showing you how the Lord has prepared the way for you, the most advanced generation in all times, to assist him in the final stages of his kingdom-building process.

The scriptures have recorded the story of God's dealings with mankind for centuries. The Old Testament deals with the history of the Hebrew nation as it records the preparations of the world for the Messiah. Starting with low, scattered notes, it expands as time passes with enlarging crescendo into clear, loud, trumpeting tones as the King approaches. Meanwhile, God in his providence is making ready the nations: Greece is spreading a common language throughout much of the earth; Rome is making one empire out of the whole world and the Roman roads make much of it accessible; the dispersion of the Jews among nations paves the way for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Savior came to a world with limited opportunity for travel and communications. Cities were located on waterways, the seas and rivers which afforded the best means of travel. Transportation by water had developed from the log to the raft to the canoe, and then on to the sailboat, which offered the best means of

moving great distances. Land travel was difficult with only a few roads, oft-times dangerous; most land travel was by foot, sometimes with the aid of domestic animals such as the dog, the horse, the donkey, the ox, and the camel.

Equally as difficult as travel problems in keeping the gospel pure and undefiled was the problem of communications, although picture writing had changed to alphabet forms and clay, rock, and metal tablets had given way to papyrus and parchment. Can you imagine how difficult it was to operate a Church in those days without our modern means of transportation and communications? My heart cries out to those early apostles as they sought to build the kingdom, realizing the problems they were facing. Just take the example of Paul as he left Ephesus, as recorded in the book of Acts. It states:

For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

[Then he instructed the people thus:] *Take heed therefore unto ourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.

And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.

And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him,

Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship [Acts 20: 16, 28–30, 36–38]

I can imagine what it was to leave those people, realizing that just one or two times would be the only opportunity Paul would ever have to visit their countries and their cities and their branches of the Church.

During the period of time between the preaching of the gospel following the Savior's mission and the restoration of the gospel, little progress was made in travel and communications. City sites were still on waterways, travel by water was still the best means to go great distances; domestic animals were still the chief means of travel overland. But dramatically, just before the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was just as if a bright light was turned on to illuminate the minds of mankind. After almost 1800 years of sluggish development, suddenly the fields of transportation and communications moved forward with a new exciting pace. In the field of communications, a machine was perfected in 1803 for making paper; by 1814, a cylinder press was developed. In the field of transportation, 1787 saw the first steamboat come into being. In 1804 the first steam railroad locomotive was constructed.

The Lord was preparing for the establishment of the gospel again on the earth for the last time, and starting preparation for the return of his Son. This time the Restoration was to be permanent. A support system would be developed that would keep everything in place. A means of transportation and communications would be established just before the growth of the Church to keep it nourished as the word of the Lord was revealed to his prophet and his children. The history of growth of transportation and communications is exciting to me as I study its development, for it parallels the growth of the Church. Review with me this remarkable history and see if it does not give you an added witness of God's dealings with his children as he prepares to spread the gospel to all parts of the earth.

On December 23, 1805, a son was born to Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith in a small,

insignificant place called Sharon in Windsor County, Vermont. As the Lord prepared for his prophet to be an instrument in his hands in effecting the restoration of the gospel, the growth of printing and transportation proceeded. In 1822 beginnings were made in photography, and 1828 marked the publication of the first American dictionary. As technology was carefully placed to support the introduction and restoration of the gospel, so a prophet was being carefully prepared and groomed for the role he was to play. A portion of his story reads as follows:

Some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country. Indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it. . . . [It] created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, "Lo, here!" and others, "Lo, there!" Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptists.

[The clergy contended] in order to have everybody converted, as they were pleased to call it, let them join what sect they pleased; yet when the converts began to file off, some to one party and some to another . . . the seemingly good feelings . . . one for another, if they ever had any were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions.

In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any . . . be right, which is it, and how shall I know it? [Joseph Smith 2:5-7, 10]

Then he recounts his reading of the first chapter and the fifth verse of the book of James.

Joseph's inquisitive mind led him to retire to the Sacred Grove and the story we all know so well unfolds—the visitation of the Father and the Son to him in that spring of 1820. Here

was explained to him his role in the restoration of the gospel. Though tested and tried during the next few years, he remained strong enough to be worthy of being entrusted with that sacred and holy calling.

Following the call came the delivery of the plates and the translation of the Book of Mormon. Now all was in readiness for the organization of the Church. On the designated date of April 6, 1830, Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and members of the Smith and Whitmer families met in the home of Peter Whitmer, Sr., in Fayette, Seneca County, New York. After appropriate songs and prayers the revelations concerning the organization of the Church were read to those assembled. These revelations set forth the order of the priesthood and the duties of the officers of the Church. Around this pattern the entire Church organization today has been built.

According to previous commandments the Prophet Joseph Smith called on the brethren present to know if they would accept him and Oliver Cowdery as their teachers in all things of the kingdom. This was approved by unanimous vote, after which the order of the Church was followed, where Joseph ordained Oliver an elder and Oliver ordained Joseph to that same office. The sacrament was administered and those who had previously been baptized were confirmed members of the Church, and received the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands. Some enjoyed the gift of the prophecy and all rejoiced exceedingly.

Immediately following the organization of the Church, missionary efforts pressed forward. Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer, Jr., were called to take the gospel to the Lamanites. A great desire was expressed by two recent converts to accompany them. So Ziba Peterson and Parley P. Pratt were also commissioned to make this first distant missionary journey. The first extended mission was one that was destined to influence the Church for many years as it proceeded after conference held in

September of 1830. The mission of these four men caused them to travel on foot for more than 1,500 miles to the West. Parley P. Pratt had previously lived in the vicinity of Kirtland, Ohio, where he had been commissioned a minister for the Campbellite faith. One of his first acts on this missionary journey was to return to Kirtland. There he sought out Sidney Rigdon, his former pastor, and preached the gospel to him. He received it, and his congregation was also receptive to the message which they brought. By the time they left they had a thriving branch of twenty members, who were, in succeeding weeks, able to bring into the Church practically all of that religious group.

The beginnings were underway. The stone was beginning to roll forth. But with the grown came opposition. The Prophet moved the center of his operations from Ohio to Missouri, and was then driven to Illinois. By 1840 twelve stakes had been organized: one in Ohio, one in Iowa, two in Missouri, and eight in Illinois. The time had then come to expand the work over the great waters. The year 1839 saw members of the newly called Quorum of the Twelve Apostles preparing for missionary assignments. The expansion created a need for better travel and communications. The Lord was already preparing the way with new and advanced technology. Morse was developing the first telegraph system in 1837. The first crossing of the Atlantic by a steam-powered ship occurred in 1838. The railroad had started to grow in the United States and by 1840 there were 2,818 miles of track.

Then opposition struck at the very heart of this new Church: The Prophet was illegally imprisoned. On the 27th day of June of 1844, a mob stormed the jail and his life was taken. After the death of the Prophet, persecution became so intense that again it was necessary for the Saints to leave their homes and journey into a barren frontier. Under the leadership of Brigham Young, members of the Church moved forward across the Mississippi and on

towards the West in the epic pioneer trek. Of the almost 70,000 who attempted the journey, about 9 percent were laid to rest along the way—a tremendous loss for a young, struggling church.

Again the Lord's hand was evident. The transcontinental railroad was completed near Promontory, Utah, in 1869. Now the Church had 100,000 members. The organization of stakes had to start all over again as they settled in the West. At the completion of the railroad, eight new stakes had been organized in Utah, and one in California. By the turn of the century in 1900, the Church membership had grown to 270,000 in forty-three stakes: twenty-eight located in Utah, thirteen in other parts of the continental United States, and two outside the continental United States in the colonies in Mexico and Canada.

The demands for better communication and transportation continued to grow; to be able to visit and travel to the growing number of members in the scattered stakes was necessary. Technology continued to keep pace. In 1885 the first transoceanic cable was laid. In 1876 a message from Bell to Watson introduced the telephone. In 1895 Marconi sent the first message by radio over the great distance of about one mile. The year 1889 saw the development of the first photographic film, 1894 the first motion picture projector. In the late 1890s, the first automobile came on the scene. Technology and Church growth continued to parallel each other. As the Church approached its 100th birthday in 1930, membership was now over one-half million in about one hundred stakes: sixty-one located in Utah, thirty-five in the balance of the continental United States, and four located outside the continental United States.

Innovations continued to supply needed requirements to nourish its growth. Between 1915 and 1920 long-distance telephone service was instituted among major cities. The first commercial radio station came on the air in 1920. Transportation continued to become

easier and faster; the automobile, the railroad and the steamship expanded their service. This period also marked the beginning of air travel; 1903 saw the Wright brothers make their first successful attempt. The first commercial airline service started at the beginning of the twenties. By 1928 in the United States we had routes covering 14,155 air miles of passenger service.

While it required one hundred years to organize the first one hundred stakes, during the next twenty years the Church added the exceeded 1,000,000. This was the period of rapid Church expansion in the western United States. Forty-eight of those new stakes were still formed in Utah, but now more than half of the number, or 51, were formed in the rest of the continental United States, and one additional was added outside the continental United States. Only one-half the amount of time was needed to establish the next one hundred stakes. By 1960 the number had reached three hundred, and the membership had grown to 1,700,000. The new Utah stakes accounted for thirty-four of this third hundred organized, with another sixty-one in other parts of the continental United States, and now five outside the continental United States. This period marked the first organization of stakes overseas in New Zealand, Australia, and England.

The leadership and financial base had been established in the United States for the growth and expansion of the Church throughout the world. The Lord continued to prepare for this expansion with new technology to support its growth: television, airline routes—and Pan American established the first jet overseas travel to coincide exactly with the organization of the first overseas stake. The computer came into existence, and technology pressed forward so that the worldwide expansion could be accomplished. It was now possible to go to and from far-off places and communicate with a worldwide organization.

The 1960s saw the growth of the Church worldwide. During this decade the number of stakes doubled the number organized in the previous ten years. Two hundred stakes were organized during the sixties; the membership was now almost three million. Of the new stakes organized only twenty percent were from the state of Utah, sixty-two percent from the balance of the continental United States, and eighteen percent from outside the United States.

Now let us look for a minute into the future and see what will occur in the Church growth as we add up the results for the decade of the 1970s. By the time the Church reaches its 150th birthday on April 6, 1980, my personal projections would have the Church membership over 4,500,000: The number of stakes organized will be about 1,225. Only ten percent of those stakes organized during the seventies will come from the state of Utah; forty-five percent will be from the continental United States, and an equal number, or forty-five percent, will now come from outside the continental United States. Of the total number of stakes we will have at the end of the seventies, thirty-one percent will be outside the continental United States, forty-three percent in the continental United States excluding Utah, while Utah will account for twenty-six percent. What a dramatic change has occurred since the sixties! What a miracle is occurring in this period in communications and transportations! Within minutes we can contact any part of the world. Within hours the most distant stakes can be visited. As this remarkable growth continues in the decade of the eighties, a whole new set of challenges will be offered to the Church. If just one-half of our percentage growth continues, the membership will almost double during the next decade. The number of stakes outside the continental United States will equal more than half the total number of stakes.

I am privileged to stand before a group today whose members the Lord has selected

to be the best trained of all the children he has ever sent to the earth. He is making the largest investment in you that he has ever made in the history of the world to produce his future leadership base. Our review of history this morning has demonstrated his hand in the establishment of the organization of the Church today. Most of the support structure in building his kingdom has come from resources outside the Church. Now, with this tremendous investment he is making in you, I wonder if that will not shift and he will expect more to come from this great institutional center. I wonder if the Lord will not expect you to carry a greater load in supplying the technology to sustain the growth of his kingdom in the years to come.

Could I suggest just a few problems that we will be facing in the next decade? First, the problem of language differences. As the Church expands worldwide, the mix between English-speaking and other languages continues to change. How inefficient it will be if we do not discover better ways to communicate! Second, the problem of training new leadership will be almost overwhelming. Most of the leaders in quorums, wards, stakes, and other places in the Church will be first-generation Mormons. The problem of training them and having them be effective in leadership will be enormous. Third, new and less expensive means of communication must be developed for the distant stakes, missions, regions, and areas, and we must find these to continue our growth. I am sure your fertile minds can think of many more.

I am encouraged with what I see in beginnings around this school. New discoveries are being made and worked on in energy sources. In this city new discoveries are being made to use the computer to increase our learning capacity and our learning capability. This University is wrestling with the problem of language differences, with some exciting results. These are beginnings, but I know the Lord is expecting more. What will your contribution be to make the return on the

investment he is making in you, so that the Church can continue to expand as it grows worldwide? May God grant you the vision to see the potential there is within you, that you may become part of a team that will build and sustain the growth of his kingdom here on earth.

I know his hand is guiding and directing us here. God still stands at the helm; Jesus is the

Christ; and Spencer W. Kimball is an instrument in his hands today to bring about this remarkable growth of his kingdom on earth. May God bless us that we may embark with great enthusiasm in accomplishing that which he would require of us in building his kingdom, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.