

Prophecies, Visions, and Dreams

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I was just handed a great note here: “Attention, Elder Perry: Could you please look toward the choir just once—all we ever get to see is the back of your head. No offense!” Now, take a good look; and after that, you will probably be sorry and wish that I had kept my face the other direction all evening.

It was just two years ago that we had the glorious privilege of coming to this first fireside of the new year. At that time I brought with me my son, my daughter, and my wife to assist me in occupying this position. After the fireside was over, the boys rushed to congratulate my wife, and I just stood there left out of the whole thing. So in order to eliminate the competition this year, I decided to try it alone.

As the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ continued after the death of the Savior, the book of Acts records that most remarkable and significant event that happened on the day of Pentecost:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. . . .

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. . . .

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: . . .

. . . This is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel;

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. [Acts 2:1–2, 4, 14, 16–17]

Peter began his great discourse on the day of Pentecost by quoting from the Old Testament prophet Joel. Joel is generally considered one of the earliest of the prophets of Judah; he lived probably in the period from 830 B.C. to about 750 B.C. This was the time after the division of

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the tribes of Israel, with Judah and some of his brethren being separated to the south and the other tribes to the north, and it was a difficult time for both Israel and Judah. The Assyrians had taken Israel into captivity, and Judah was soon to have its difficulties with Babylon. Joel, in that period of great trial, prophesied of the coming of the Lord and taught the people how to prepare for that great day. He must have been excited about this period and must have looked forward to it with fond hope.

Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, was caught up in that same spirit of Joel on the day of Pentecost. He wanted the people to be caught up in the spirit of prophecy, vision, and dreams as they contemplated the mission of our Lord and Savior. He testified to them of Jesus Christ, saying, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). As we pause tonight to contemplate another new year, I would hope that for a few minutes we could catch the spirit of Joel or of Peter as we reflect on prophecy, vision, and dreams.

It was interesting to me, as I considered these three words while reading the scriptures, to find that they have a variety of meanings. The dictionary tells us that *prophecy* means declaration or prediction uttered under the influence of divine guidance, or prediction of any type, or preaching or teaching of religious matters. It also states that vision is the act of seeing with the eye something supposedly seen by other than normal sight: a mental image, an imaginative contemplation, a force of the imagination, or (I don't know how this one got in there) something or someone—especially a woman—extraordinarily beautiful. Finally, the dictionary defines *dreams* as a sequence of sensations, images, and thoughts passing through a sleeping person's mind, a fanciful vision, a fancy of the conscious mind, or a fond hope or aspiration.

Because the great day of the Lord is not quite yet upon us, for the purpose of this gathering tonight could I use those definitions that would be most easily understood by us regular mortals? Let us use the portion of the definition with which we can most easily associate: prophecy—teaching or preaching of religious matters; vision—an imaginative contemplation; dream—fond hope or aspiration.

My daughter, Linda Gay, is always concerned when I receive one of these assignments at Brigham Young University. She worries about my preparation and tries to see that I start early enough. So right after Christmas she came to me and said, "Have you started on your Fourteen-Stake Fireside talk yet?" I remarked to her that I had decided on a subject; she wanted to check it out for approval. When I told her the subject, she went over and picked up the *Good Housekeeping* magazine for the month of November, opened it to page 96, and said, "Read this. This is the kind of dreams BYU students will appreciate." It was a series of dreams of little children, ages six to twelve, compiled by Bill Adler; a sampling of them follows.

First, from Janice R., age ten: "The difference between a dream and a nightmare is like when you dream about vacation it is a dream, and when you dream about school it is a nightmare."

Or Jennifer P., age seven: "Once I dreamed that I was a mommy, but I know that I can't be a mommy yet because I can't even cross the street by myself."

Or Alice R., age nine: "Sometimes I have happy dreams and sometimes I have sad dreams. I think everybody has sad dreams sometimes—even President Carter."

This is one I especially liked from Marvin B., age nine: "I dreamed my mother was the best cook in the whole world and then when I had dinner I knew it was only a dream." ("Mommy, Wanna Know What I Dreamed?" *Good Housekeeping*, November 1978, pp. 96, 98, 100.)

Now, as we are assembled here to consider the beginnings of another new year, let us take time to teach religious matters, time to indulge in imaginative contemplation, and time to entertain fond hopes and new aspirations.

First, time to teach religious matters: At the beginning of 1979 we find The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the strongest position it has held in all of its 149 years' history since the Restoration. Last year we experienced unprecedented growth. During the period from 1830, the year the Church was organized, to 1930, the hundredth birthday of the Church, the great sum of 104 stakes were organized. During the just-concluded year of 1978 alone, we organized 105 stakes—one more than was accomplished in the first hundred years. To me this is historically significant. The prophecy of the Prophet Joseph Smith is literally being fulfilled at an ever-accelerating rate. As he said,

Our missionaries are going forth to different nations, and in Germany, Palestine, New Holland, Australia, the East Indies, and other places, the Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, 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. [History of the Church, 4:5–40]

The members of the Church today have taken upon them by covenant the obligation of preparing the world for the return of the great Jehovah. We have been delegated two special assignments. One is to be a missionary Church; we have an obligation to teach the gospel. Sometimes I wonder why, with all the talents with which the Lord has blessed us, we always seem to go about missionary work in the most difficult way. It seems that every time we think

of missionary work, we think of tracting. We do not think of using the great talents that our Father in Heaven has given us to start and continue this onward growth of the gospel.

A few years ago I was visiting in Brazil, where a new mission president had just arrived. He was excited about returning to his old field of labor in the mission field, the same area in which he had served as a nineteen-year-old missionary. He told us he would never forget his first day in the mission field, for it taught him a great lesson about using his talents to teach the gospel.

He and his senior companion were assigned to open a new city some distance from the mission headquarters. As they arrived in this new city and walked down the street, they passed a church with a minister standing at the front door. As they walked by the church, the minister went in and called to his whole congregation to follow him out into the street. There they followed the missionaries and started calling them names; then they became more violent and started to throw rocks at them.

The young elder was excited about this experience—his first day in the mission field and already he was being stoned, he thought. Then, a big rock suddenly hit him squarely in the middle of the back, and his feeling changed to anger. Before entering the mission field he had been quite a baseball pitcher; and in the flush of anger he wheeled around, grabbed the first rock he could find on the ground, reared back in his famous pitching pose, and just ready to let the rock fly at the crowd when suddenly he realized why he was there. He had not been sent all the way to Brazil to throw rocks at people; he was there to teach them the gospel. But what was he to do with the rock in his hand? If he dropped it to the ground, they would think it a sign of weakness and probably continue to throw rocks at them. Yet he could not throw it at the crowd. Then he saw a telephone post some distance away. That was the way to save face! He reared back and let

the rock fly directly at the telephone post, hitting it squarely in the middle.

The people in the crowd took a couple of steps back. They suddenly realized that that rock probably could have hit any one of them right between the eyes. Their mood changed; instead of throwing rocks at the missionaries, they began to throw them at the telephone post. After this incident, every time the elder went down that street he was challenged to a rock-throwing contest. The rock-throwing contests led to discussions of the gospel, which led to conversions, which led to the establishment of a branch of the Church in that community. Do you see the talents that we have but we never consider using to help build the Kingdom? I think we ought to use the talents our Father in Heaven has given to us to help this great work grow.

Another important assignment, as President Kimball recently said, is "The monumental challenge. . . to provide trained leadership for the fast-multiplying units of the Church." If growth continues at the rate of the past year, what a challenge this is! If that rate continues, during the next ten years we will need 300 new Regional Representatives, 700 new mission presidents, 1,000 new stake presidents, 19,600 new bishops, 49,000 new elders quorum presidents, and 150,000 new ward and branch clerks. The number of Young Women, Relief Society, and Primary presidents will increase by about 100,000 during the next ten years. Can you start to see the vision and the impact of this tremendous growth on you as you prepare for your responsibility in building our Father in Heaven's kingdom?

I used to watch my father during the time he served as a bishop; he carried that responsibility during the Great Depression, when he had an added welfare burden. How often I remember going out with him, night after night, to deliver a sack of flour, a sack of sugar, or some other commodity to someone in need. We always had difficulty managing an uninterrupted vacation.

I remember particularly one time when we had had an exciting day fishing on Lake Yellowstone. As I passed the lodge at Fishing Bridge, I saw a sign in the window: "A telegram for L. Tom Perry." Without reading it, I knew what that meant. I was right—a widow had passed away, and we had to leave our vacation early and return home so that Dad could conduct the funeral. I saw him also during tithing settlement, interviewing hour after hour, day after day, until he completed his assignment.

Then the time came for his release after serving as bishop for eighteen years. That day I caught a little of the vision of true service and the joy it brings. It had been indicated to him that he was going to be called to the high council, but as stake conference approached no one issued a call to him. As we sat in stake conference that day my father's heart was heavy; he realized that his great service as a bishop was about over, and he had not received a new call to replace it. Then, without any previous warning, the visiting General Authority, in reorganizing our stake presidency, called my father into that presidency. He served in it as a counselor or as stake president for the next twenty years, all of that time filled with joy at the opportunity of service.

It was not much longer in my own life, having seen the burden that my father carried so joyfully, until I too found the thrill and joy of gospel service. In fact, when I returned to the States after completing my assignment in Japan with the occupation troops after World War II, I discovered that one month before I was due to return my name had been presented in stake conference and I had been called to be a counselor in the stake MIA. This was a great blessing to me, for in this position, as I presided at one of the stake meetings one night, I saw a beautiful lady in the congregation who later became my wife.

We moved to Boise, Idaho, and shortly after our arrival I was called to be an elders quorum president. This position built in me the

confidence to stand on my feet and express myself. We moved from Boise to Lewiston, Idaho; a month after we arrived the bishopric was reorganized, and I was called to be a counselor in that bishopric. This blessed me with an understanding of organization. We moved to California, and soon after our arrival I was called to the high council. This position taught me how to stand in front of a group and train leaders. After several years in the high council, I was called to be a member of the stake presidency at a time when we were constructing many chapels in that area. The position taught me finance. Then we moved to New York, and a day or two after our arrival I was called to be the stake mission president during the time of the New York World's Fair. I had the opportunity of meeting literally hundreds of thousands of people in that assignment.

After the fair I was called back into the high council, again an opportunity to learn how to train. We moved from New York to Massachusetts; two weeks after we arrived our bishopric was reorganized, and I was called again to be a counselor. The bishop and I had such an enjoyable time together that we just hated to think of anything interrupting that great association. Then came time to reorganize the Boston Stake. He was called in for an interview just ahead of me by the General Authority present there. When I followed him in for my interview, the first question that was asked of me was, "What do you think of the bishop as a leader?" I started giving glowing reports about what a leader he was. Then it dawned on me that they might call him to be a stake president if I made him look too good, and our service would be interrupted—and we were having such an enjoyable time together! So I said, "He is a great leader, but under pressure he goes home and beats his wife."

The General Authority leaned back in his chair and a smile came over his face. He said, "Isn't that funny? He was just in here ahead of

you, and he accused you of going out behind the barn and smoking cigars."

In that reorganization I was called to be a counselor in the stake presidency and later a stake president. This call had a special way of teaching me closeness to the Lord.

As I look back over my Church experiences, each one has had a special meaning in my life. They have brought me great growth and development that I could have found in no other way. What great joy and happiness comes with service in our Father in Heaven's kingdom! May you resolve this day to prepare yourself for a lifetime of teaching in religious matters.

Second, time to indulge in imaginative contemplation: In all the history of the world there has never been a group of young adults with a greater opportunity to prepare for the life ahead of them than you who are here at Brigham Young University today. The Church is investing more in you and your education than it has in any other group of our Father in Heaven's children in any age or time. Think of that: the greatest investment is being made in you.

I gained an appreciation for that investment about a month ago. My wife and I were on assignment to Turkey, and we visited the home of one of the good members there. Living conditions were deplorable. There was no floor covering. There were no closets in the house. When it rained, the rain poured in through the windows. One side of the home was a barnyard, the backyard a cesspool, the front yard a mud puddle. But the branch president assured me that even in these humble conditions that family paid a full tithe. That is the type of sacrifice that is helping keep you at this University.

I weep a little inside once in a while when I see some of you fight against the gospel standards which each of you had solemnly pledged on your honor to uphold at this institution. Let me give you an example. Some time ago I was on Brigham Young University campus on a Sunday evening near one of the apartment

complexes where car after car was pulling in. All of the students were dressed in grubby jeans. It was evident that they had been to the canyons or some other place for a Sunday afternoon activity. Now at any other university in the world, no one would think much of this; it is commonplace. But here it was not the atmosphere for the Sabbath day. You are different; you have accepted the responsibility of setting a standard for the world, a standard different from that of any other university. We expect that from you. If the widow's mite is putting you through school, surely you should do your part.

The Lord is expecting from you a return on the investment he is making in you. If you put forth the effort, he will reward you openly and abundantly. If you rob him of that which you have been asked to do and fail to give him that return of academic excellence, of high moral standards, of preparation for service in his Kingdom, and of the integrity required of you at this institution, you will pay the price. His judgments are just and absolute.

This experience that you are having at Brigham Young University also gives you an opportunity to prepare for the life ahead of you, a life that could give you one of the greatest roles our Father in Heaven had designated for his children here: that of husband, wife, father, mother.

Our greatest gift this Christmas season was a telephone call announcing the birth of a new granddaughter, born on Christmas Day. My son excitedly called from his apartment in New Haven, Connecticut, where he is a student at Yale, to tell us of the arrival of a baby girl. A few days later we called him to see what kind of a father he was and to see if everything was all right. It happened to be just a few hours after he had brought the mother and the new infant home from the hospital, and you cannot imagine the excitement in his voice. He had been sitting in the rocking chair, rocking the little babe. He said, "You know, Dad, I've never felt like this

over anyone before. Why, she's just beautiful." And I thought of the great blessings that come from starting to build eternal family relationships. That relationship between him and his wife began here at Brigham Young University, right after they graduated, and has matured and blossomed as he has gone on to advanced education. What opportunities there are for you to have imaginative contemplation as you prepare for your time of fulfillment here on earth!

Third, time to entertain fond hopes and new aspirations: may this new year be for you a time of their fulfillment. As you look over the world in which we live at the beginning of 1979, the hope for a better world looks very bleak. Two great forces are locked in a dreadful struggle; one of these forces would destroy the agency of man and lead him captive to the desires of those who wish to dominate the world. A few million lives are expendable to them so long as their selfish aims are fulfilled.

But the other force believes in the dignity of man. What is done on earth must be for his good; his life and happiness are all-important. Each year we see more of a dominance of the first force.

I wonder if we are not sitting in a position similar to that of the ancient prophets of the Old Testament. They could see that their brethren to the north were already in slavery because they had failed to heed the word of the Lord. The prophets among Judah cried continually to the people to repent and thus avoid the same fate that had befallen the members of the other tribes. Is there a similarity between that which we see today and this far-off time in Israel?

How important it is that we heed the voice of a living prophet and conform our lives to the gospel of Jesus Christ! Even though the outlook for peace is bleak in the world today, it is not a time for despair. We live in a day when change can be effected very rapidly. The Lord has blessed us with a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ and has also led us to an

understanding of the technology that can bring about this change. This is a time not for despair but for preparation, courage, and action. Think of the glorious changes that have occurred in our lifetime.

We were out on our ranch in Wyoming over the New Year's holiday. It was bitter cold—the temperature stood between thirty and forty degrees below zero. As my brother-in-law was bundling up one morning to go out and feed the cattle, I thought, "What a terrible chore on such a cold day!" I reflected back to my childhood, when I would see the men with their pitchforks go up on top of the haystacks, throw the hay down on the hayrack, get on the hayrack, and drive out to throw the hay to the cattle—handling every forkful of hay twice. I thought how much better it was the last time I assisted in the process. I rode in the back of a pickup truck already loaded with bales that had been loaded in the truck from a conveyor system. As we rode along, we would cut a string and drop the bale off the back end of the truck. It was still hard work, but much easier than handling it with a pitchfork twice.

Then I watched my brother-in-law go out into the cold, climb into a heated tractor cab, turn on his stereo music, and drive over to pick up a whole haystack at one time with his machine. Then I watched him go out to the field, with his machinery throwing the hay out the back end to feed his very large herd as he drove in the comfort of his heated cab and listened to beautiful music. How conditions have changed!

In the ninth grade I developed the habit of carrying a slide rule around with me almost continuously. Any time I had difficulty solving a question in multiplication or division, I could whip out my slide rule and figure the answer instantaneously and accurately up to three digits. I do not carry the slide rule around with me any more; but I have something exactly the same size—a little calculator. All I have to do is turn up the lever here and I can add, subtract,

multiply. Divide—now up to eight digits. Not only that, but it has the time of day. When I press this button, it gives me the date. When I'm traveling overseas, it will keep track of two times for me—one at home and one abroad. It has two alarms to wake me up in the morning. It will count down from twenty-four hours to zero or up from zero to twenty-four hours for me, and then give me a little buzz to let me know that it is time to stop or continue. It is powered with an energy source, not like a slide rule.

We live in a great day. Are we the type that is just sliding by, or are we powered with the energy source of the Spirit of our Father in Heaven, knowing no limitation to the power or effort that we can generate? This is not an age for the "also-ran." This is not an age for those who "almost made it." I liked Coach Arnold's "Number One" button; and, Danny [Ainge], I hope that we are soon there, because we should be second in nothing. We have a source of power within us that we should understand, and we should realize the potential of that power that burns within our soul. This is an age for *number ones*, for winners! If we are to stem the tide and start building a better world, we must get in the habit of being winners. This is the time for fond hopes and new aspirations.

William James, the famous author, quotes this anonymous verse:

*Sow a thought, and you reap an act;
Sow an act, and you reap habit;
Sow a habit, and you reap a character;
Sow a character, and you reap a destiny.*
[John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, 14th ed.
(Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968), p. 1100]

How important it is that we think right beginning thoughts! It is interesting to note that the mind can comprehend only one thought at a time. Therefore, our destiny may be determined by a single thought. It is up to each of us to make certain that that thought is

positive rather than negative. Our actions, attitudes, and life should be directed accordingly. Once we get our minds right, we get in the habit of winning—the success habit—and we start succeeding a little more every day.

This is why success is not luck. Success can be predictable. If every day is successful, the results will be a successful week, a successful year, and a successful life. Live one hundred percent for the day, as though each day were a building block. Do each day that which needs to be done.

The poet has written:

*Look to this Day! . . .
For Yesterday is but a Dream,
And To-morrow is only a Vision:
But To-day well-lived makes
Every Yesterday a Dream of Happiness,
And every To-morrow a Vision of Hope.
Look well therefore to this Day!*

[Quoted in James Dalton Morrison, ed., *Masterpieces of Religious Verse* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), p.301]

I give you my witness that you are a child of God, born with an immortal spirit. Each one of you possesses great talent and ability waiting to be trained, harnessed, and engaged in the greatest of all responsibilities: the building of our Father in Heaven's kingdom here on earth, and preparation for life eternal that is to follow.

God bless each of us this new year that we may realize our great potential, that we may take time to teach religious matters, to indulge in imaginative contemplation, to entertain and achieve fond hopes and new aspirations. God lives; Jesus is the Christ, and his Church has been established on the earth in this day. That witness I give to you tonight in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.