

Search the Prophets

L. ALDIN PORTER

I thought if somehow I could help you understand the deep love and affection that our Brethren of the General Authorities have for you, my time tonight, and yours as well, would be well spent. Will you please know how deeply you are loved and respected and how very much concern and prayer goes up to our Father in Heaven in your behalf? I appreciate that beautiful music, and that particular number (“Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 30) reminds us of the times of oxen and wagons and handcarts and horses—when 15 miles a day would have been considered a fair day’s travel.

Last November I had the opportunity to travel with President Gordon B. Hinckley, President Boyd K. Packer, Elder David B. Haight, and others to Nauvoo to the dedication of the cornerstones of the temple, which was a reenactment of the original cornerstone dedication under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith. And yet it was not just a reenactment; it was, in fact, a dedication of those stones. We arose at a normal hour at home, had time for breakfast, flew to Nauvoo, completed that marvelous experience of the dedication, and were home in ample time for dinner with the family. I could not help but think of my ancestors and others who paid such a price

to travel that same distance over many months with enormous cost in sacrifice of comfort and safety.

We have made similar advances in the opportunities for communication, education, and learning, yet I am sure we have barely scratched the surface. Just stop and realize that there is, even now, an explosion of resources that makes it possible for a person living in the most remote areas of the world to have access to the finest libraries.

Yet in all this, we would do well to remember that some things do not change. Tonight I would like to talk about principles, values that do not change, and the role that our present prophets have in holding us firm to those principles. These values and principles are as new and fresh as the latest Internet communication. Yet living by them has blessed mankind since the very dawn of this earth’s existence.

In September 1995 in the general Relief Society meeting, President Hinckley

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introduced a remarkable document. It was the work of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve and most certainly the inspiration of heaven. President Hinckley said in introducing that document:

*With so much of sophistry that is passed off as truth, with so much of deception concerning standards and values, with so much of allurements and enticement to take on the slow stain of the world, we have felt to warn and forewarn. In furtherance of this we of the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles now issue a proclamation to the Church and to the world as a declaration and reaffirmation of standards, doctrines, and practices relative to the family which the prophets, seers, and revelators of this church have repeatedly stated throughout its history. [“Stand Strong Against the Wiles of the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 100]*

He then read the entire proclamation. Would you note some words he used—*deception, allurements, enticement, warn, and forewarn*.

Study the Proclamation on the Family

The majority of those of you listening tonight will within a few months or years seriously contemplate getting married. Some of you may have already taken that very important step. May I suggest in all seriousness and solemnity that a very careful study of that proclamation will assist you in a major way as you begin to build a home and a family. Now a voice of warning. If your proposed marriage partner is not in agreement with the doctrines taught therein, know there is danger in your committing your life to him or to her.

When I was first presented with a copy of the proclamation and noted that it carried the stamp of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, I was reminded of a day many years ago when I was sitting in general conference; it was long before the call to the Seventy came to me. President Joseph Fielding Smith

was talking. It was priesthood meeting. It was the last general priesthood meeting prior to his death, and he made a statement that settled on my soul as pure truth. Let me quote it to you:

*Now, brethren, I think there is one thing which we should have exceedingly clear in our minds. Neither the President of the Church, nor the First Presidency, nor the united voice of the First Presidency and the Twelve will ever lead the Saints astray or send forth counsel to the world that is contrary to the mind and will of the Lord. [In Conference Report, April 1972, 99; or “Eternal Keys and the Right to Preside,” *Ensign*, July 1972, 88]*

My dear young brothers and sisters, I stand here tonight as a witness of the truthfulness of that statement. It has been made clear to me more times than I can count that the senior Brethren—those whom we sustain as apostles, prophets, and revelators—speak the mind and will of the Lord as President Smith bore witness they do. With that in mind, let me read portions of the proclamation:

*We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children. [“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102]*

My young brothers and sisters, if the number-one objective of your life is not to establish an eternal family, then you are going to forego an essential element for happiness here and hereafter. I might say that you would be wise not to put off that day for trivial reasons or maybe for reasons that aren’t so trivial. To continue: “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God.

Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents." Will you note that?

Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

As you read the proclamation, consider every single sentence. For instance, there is a great deal of confusion today in the world about gender. Here the prophets have spoken clearly. Note this:

In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life. . . .

The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force.

Now, let me say to you that you are challenged. You of your generation are challenged to live in a world that has largely abandoned the doctrine just read. Current thinking suggests that families impede one's career or certainly interfere with personal fulfillment. I promise you that you can be certain that sorrow and regret will eventually come to those who ignore or rebel against this commandment from our Father in Heaven. I read from the proclamation again:

We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

Please forgive me for speaking very frankly. Far too many of your generation think it is all right to dabble in sexual sin and that they will be free from any serious consequences. Listen carefully to the following warning and instruction that was given to the young men of the Church some months ago. President Hinckley said:

*You live in a world of terrible temptations. Pornography, with its sleazy filth, sweeps over the earth like a horrible, engulfing tide. It is poison. Do not watch it or read it. It will destroy you if you do. It will take from you your self-respect. It will rob you of a sense of the beauties of life. It will tear you down and pull you into a slough of evil thoughts and possibly of evil actions. Stay away from it. Shun it as you would a foul disease, for it is just as deadly. Be virtuous in thought and in deed. God has planted in you, for a purpose, a divine urge which may be easily subverted to evil and destructive ends. When you are young, do not get involved in steady dating. When you reach an age where you think of marriage, then is the time to become so involved. [In Conference Report, October 1997, 71-72; or "Some Thoughts on Temples, Retention of Converts, and Missionary Service," *Ensign*, November 1997, 51]*

Can you not feel the spiritual power of that man whom the Lord has raised up to lead us giving a warning to you individually? You may say, "Well, that is good for someone else." Will you contemplate his words in your own life? Measure your activities against what the prophet has asked us to do. Do you realize that the message through the ages from the prophets has been to stay clean, to stay pure, and they promise that you will reap unlimited happiness? Now let us return to the proclamation:

We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm

the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan.

Much of what is seen today on network television, videos, movies, other means of communication, and the Internet is degrading to women and desecrates the sacredness of the power of procreation. I would that I had sufficient words or capacity in the English language to impress upon you the necessity of cleanliness of thought and action in order to build a strong foundation of righteousness in anticipation of a happy and fulfilling life. I testify to you from the depth of my soul that what President Hinckley just said is true. Think about it. I quote again from the proclamation:

Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. "Children are an heritage of the Lord" (Psalms 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs,

[Did you note "to provide for their physical needs"? I'll come back to that in a few minutes. Let me continue:]

to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

Do not take lightly that last statement: "Will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations."

Discipline Brings Freedom

Would you note the comment from the Brethren about the necessity for parents to provide for their children's physical needs? When we are small children, we want what we want when we want it, and some of us never get over that impediment; we remain

self-centered and demanding of others as we reach adulthood.

Will you understand that we simply cannot have all that we may want at any age? Discipline and freedom walk hand in hand. License is not freedom, though Lucifer would have you think so. License is eventually slavery. Discipline will bring freedom. I realize that may sound strange; it is the truth. Discipline in every facet of your lives will bring you freedom. One without the other will not deliver the rewards we seek. Much unhappiness develops in a home where there is no financial discipline. Think about that. Even prior to your marriage, practice financial discipline.

Permit me to read the words of the president of the Church as he gave them to us in priesthood meeting in October of 1998 (Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, October 1998, 69–72; or "To the Boys and to the Men," *Ensign*, November 1998, 52–54). He said: "I wish to speak to you about temporal matters." He then reviewed the experiences of Joseph of Egypt and the seven years of plenty followed by the seven years of famine. Now, note carefully. Then he said:

I am suggesting that the time has come to get our houses in order.

So many of our people are living on the very edge of their incomes. In fact, some are living on borrowings.

We have witnessed in recent weeks wide and fearsome swings in the markets of the world. The economy is a fragile thing. A stumble in the economy in Jakarta or Moscow can immediately affect the entire world. It can eventually reach down to each of us as individuals. [Note the next sentence:] There is a portent of stormy weather ahead to which we had better give heed.

Might I say that those words are filled with warning from one who is a seer, one who can see afar off, and through his prophetic insight raises a warning voice. He continued:

I am troubled by the huge consumer installment debt which hangs over the people of the nation, including our own people. . . .

I recognize that it may be necessary to borrow to get a home, of course. But let us buy a home that we can afford and thus ease the payments which will constantly hang over our heads without mercy or respite for as long as 30 years. . . .

I urge you, brethren . . .

Keep in mind, sisters, that this was a priesthood meeting. I'm sure the counsel is good for each of us.

I urge you, brethren, to look to the condition of your finances. I urge you to be modest in your expenditures; discipline yourselves in your purchases to avoid debt to the extent possible. Pay off debt as quickly as you can, and free yourselves from bondage.

This is a part of the temporal gospel in which we believe. May the Lord bless you, my beloved brethren, to set your houses in order.

When I returned from my full-time mission years ago, in those days we used to report our missions to General Authorities. I gave mine to Elder LeGrand Richards of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. As part of that report he gave me some marvelous advice, which you may think is very difficult to do. He told me to always pay my tithing, which would not be a surprise from a member of the Twelve. But then he said to save an equal amount. He suggested the best place to invest the savings was in education both for me and for my future wife. The second-best place was to invest in a home. The third was anywhere else as long as it was an investment that protected my hard-earned savings.

I would heartily recommend you carefully consider Elder Richards' counsel. I was younger than many of you here tonight when he gave me this counsel. Most of you won't

even remember, but in my young days Will Rogers was a famous cowboy philosopher. He said, "I am more concerned about the return of my money than the return on my money." That's good counsel.

A very recent newspaper editorial indicated that "a record 15,138 Utahns filed for bankruptcy last year, an increase of 8 percent over 1999." Think about that. Consider this: Utah is the number-two state in the nation "for per-capita bankruptcy filings," according to this editorial ("Broken Promises," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 January 2001, A8).

What an indictment of those of us who live in Utah! I appreciate that many listening tonight are not natives of Utah. I think the principle and the problem might extend to you, and I ask you to think about it. We, of all the people in the entire world, should have learned by sad experience to listen to the prophets. Hear me carefully so you don't misunderstand. Our bankruptcy law is on the books for the rare occasion when true disaster strikes a family, and none of us would take away that protection. But I'll also tell you it cannot function as it ought in a society with overextended and, frankly, somewhat dishonest people.

The editorial goes on to suggest that the majority of these 15,000 people are not using chapter 13. Chapter 13 of the Bankruptcy Act permits the applicant to repay his debts over a longer period of time, but to pay them himself or herself. Instead, more than 9,000 of those 15,000 people applied for chapter 7, which permits one to break his promises to his creditors and walk away from his debts, leaving his obligations forever unpaid.

We have just enjoyed a period of economic health in Utah and most other areas in the United States rarely matched in our history. Yet in the midst of all this, a record number of Utahns wanted someone else to pay their debts. Now, as I said a moment ago, I have

only the statistics for Utah, but I am quite certain this is not a Utah problem only.

There is a question asked of those who seek a temple recommend that deals with honesty. I sincerely hope that those who have taken unfair advantage of this just and proper law don't carry a temple recommend and feel that they're absolved from responsibilities. I wonder how many there might be in that situation.

Well, there's been in the last decade, in my judgment, a serious decline in honesty, truthfulness, fidelity, honor, and veracity. In their place, many have substituted duplicity and falsehood.

Surely President Hinckley's counsel to set your houses in order is important to remember as you look forward to establishing permanent homes.

In the early days of the Restoration, the Lord called upon the Saints to settle in Jackson County, Missouri. They had been there just a few years when they were driven out by armed mobs. The Prophet Joseph Smith, who was in Kirtland at the time, received the mind and will of the Lord as to why this had happened. Now keep in mind they were sent to Jackson County at the instruction of the Prophet. They were then driven out. Obviously the president of the Church was concerned about what had happened. The Lord answered him in the revelation we know as section 101 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Will you note carefully the Lord's words?

Verily I say unto you, concerning your brethren who have been afflicted, and persecuted, and cast out from the land of their inheritance—

I, the Lord, have suffered the affliction to come upon them, wherewith they have been afflicted, in consequence of their transgressions. [D&C 101:1–2]

The Lord enumerates some of those transgressions, and, by the way, among them was not murder, not adultery, not thievery—those which we might consider to be of

enormous consequences. The last one the Lord mentioned was this one:

They were slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble.

In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but, in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me. [D&C 101:7–8; see also HC 1:453–64]

The Lord also made clear in verse 3 of that revelation that “they shall be mine in that day when I shall come to make up my jewels,” but I would add they did learn by their suffering to hear the word of the Lord through His prophets.

Now a fundamental truth: A great deal of contention originates in the home over a lack of discipline in financial matters. Remember again, discipline is a prerequisite to personal and family freedom. Let us return to the proclamation:

The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.

I know these quotes are long today. I wondered and worried about that but honestly felt I could not describe the doctrines that I thought you needed to understand as they are recorded in this magnificent proclamation. Now let us come to a conclusion of the proclamation:

We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God.

Do you note how many times the First Presidency and the Twelve have indicated to us that if we refuse to hear them and we refuse to obey we will account not to them but before God? We continue:

Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

Heed the Voice of the Lord Through His Prophets

I said a moment ago that I have a sincere conviction that we will in fact one day stand before God. We live in times of peace and plenty for the most part. I must admit that I have a fear that in another day, another time, our descendants may one day describe us as

slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble.

In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but, in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me. [D&C 101:7–8]

Whether it be in matters of obedience to spiritual laws or to temporal laws, we would be very wise to listen to His counsel as revealed through His servants the prophets in the days of our peace.

Now, sisters, in President Hinckley's talk to you the day he introduced the proclamation on the family, he said these words:

I believe this is the best season for women in all the history of the world. In opportunities for education, for the training of your hands and minds, there has never before been a time when doors were so widely opened to you as they are today.

But neither has there been a time, at least in recent history, when you have been confronted with more challenging problems. I need not remind you that the world we are in is a world of turmoil, of shifting values. Shrill voices call out for one thing or another in betrayal of time-tested standards of behavior. The moral moorings [note President Hinckley said "the moral moorings"] of our society have been badly shaken. So many of the youth of the world, and likewise so many of their elders, listen only to the seductive voice of self-gratification. You single young women face tremendous challenges, and we know it is not easy for you. I cannot say enough of appreciation for your determination to live by the standards of the Church, to walk with the strength of virtue, to keep your minds above the slough of filth which seems to be moving like a flood across the world. ["Stand Strong Against the Wiles of the World," 99]

"The seductive voice of self-gratification"—the lure, my young brothers and sisters, of Satan's way sounds so logical and really so innocent. It is not!

The prophets are "watchmen on the tower" (see 2 Kings 9:17; D&C 101:45). They are seers. They have a mantle whereby they see what lies ahead, and they give warning to those wise enough to listen. In section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants, in speaking of His prophets, the Lord said this:

What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine

own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same. [D&C 1:38]

I would also say to you that when President Gordon B. Hinckley speaks, the other 14 men who we have sustained as prophets will be in harmony with him. You will not do well if you seek to find disagreement or contention among their other speeches. I promise you that you will be disappointed if you seek to shop among them for justification for your opposition to the word of the Lord, and I hasten to warn you that you will stand alone when the day comes should you rebel against the prophets.

What we need today is not more prophets. What we need today is people with listening ears, people who can internalize, who can feel the words of the living prophets. We need more of us who are willing to keep the sacred covenants that we have made.

Now, you need to understand that this is our day. This is your time. We honor, as we should, our forefathers for their enormous sacrifices not just in the Church but in the cause of freedom, but I ask you, “Are we only the descendants of great men and women? Do we not have a part to play in the ongoing work of the Lord Jesus Christ?” The answer is, “Of course we do.” And as our forefathers did not fail in their challenges, we must not fail in ours. They found the light and direction they needed in the living prophets of their day. We will find the light and direction we need in our day from the same source, even the living prophets of today.

I stand before you tonight in all solemnity as a witness that the Lord Jesus Christ lives and is directing His Church today. I stand further as a witness that there are living prophets among us. That we will have ears to hear is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.