

The Watchman on the Tower

EARL C. TINGEY

It's wonderful to be with you this morning on the BYU campus. Before I share with you my prepared remarks, I have just a couple of thoughts I would like to express. First of all, thank you for that lovely choir that has come together with a beautiful hymn. I felt of the Spirit, and I pray the Spirit will continue as we meet here today.

I just returned a few days ago from an assignment in the South Pacific, where I had stake conferences and trained temple workers in the islands of Fiji and Tonga and visited missionaries in the New Zealand Wellington Mission. I wish I could take you there and let you feel of the faith of these wonderful Saints of the islands, and I wish I could bring them here to see the opportunities that you have. We would both benefit from that. The Church is doing well in those islands, but there are great challenges. They don't have near the opportunities and privileges that you have—especially for education. But how blessed you are and how blessed they are to do what they can in the circumstances that they have.

Second, the last almost six years I have been a member of the Church Board of Education, which includes the Board of Trustees for Brigham Young University here at Provo and for the other Church Educational System

institutions. I meet every other week with the executive board, which consists of two members of the Twelve and the Church commissioner, and then every month we meet with the First Presidency as the Board of Trustees. I just want you to know how much these Brethren love you and how concerned they are that you get a good education, that you are happy, that you are doing well, that you are physically healthy and strong, and that you are achieving what you desire to achieve here at this university.

This is a remarkable university. President Cecil Samuelson is one of my esteemed Brethren of the Seventy, and we served together in the presidency for several years before he was called to this position. So it's a wonderful privilege to be back here. I'm also grateful for Brother John Tanner, one of your great vice presidents who does all that he does so very well.

Now, what I would like to do today is to share with you a beautiful parable. Most of the parables are found in the New Testament,

Earl C. Tingey was a member of the Presidency of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given on 5 June 2007.

where Jesus taught with such beauty and simplicity; however, the parable I would like to share is found in the Doctrine and Covenants and was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith in Kirtland in 1833. It is the parable of the watchman on the tower:

A certain nobleman had a spot of land, very choice; and he said unto his servants: Go ye unto my vineyard, even upon this very choice piece of land, and plant twelve olive-trees;

And set watchmen round about them, and build a tower, that one may overlook the land round about, to be a watchman upon the tower, that mine olive-trees may not be broken down when the enemy shall come to spoil and take upon themselves the fruit of my vineyard.

Now, the servants of the nobleman went and did as their lord commanded them, and planted the olive-trees, and built a hedge round about, and set watchmen, and began to build a tower.

And while they were yet laying the foundation thereof, they began to say among themselves: And what need hath my lord of this tower?

And consulted for a long time, saying among themselves: What need hath my lord of this tower, seeing this is a time of peace?

Might not this money be given to the exchangers? For there is no need of these things.

And while they were at variance one with another they became very slothful, and they hearkened not unto the commandments of their lord.

And the enemy came by night, and broke down the hedge; and the servants of the nobleman arose and were affrighted, and fled; and the enemy destroyed their works, and broke down the olive-trees.

Now, behold, the nobleman, the lord of the vineyard, called upon his servants, and said unto them, Why! what is the cause of this great evil?

Ought ye not to have done even as I commanded you, and—after ye had planted the vineyard, and built the hedge round about, and set watchmen upon the walls thereof—built the tower also, and set a watchman upon the tower, and watched for

my vineyard, and not have fallen asleep, lest the enemy should come upon you?

And behold, the watchman upon the tower would have seen the enemy while he was yet afar off; and then ye could have made ready and kept the enemy from breaking down the hedge thereof, and saved my vineyard from the hands of the destroyer.¹

This parable is found in section 101 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Let me summarize what happened in this parable: A loving nobleman had 12 olive trees he wished to protect. He instructed his servants to guard them. They built a hedge to protect against any intrusion. They were also to build a tower where a watchman could watch for the enemy. However, the servants, in the process of performing their work, became slothful, discounted the instructions from the nobleman, and fell asleep. Then the enemy came and destroyed the olive trees.

It is a simple parable, but it has great application today. Let's review several of the key elements:

First, there is a nobleman. We might say for us today that the nobleman is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord of the vineyard. He is the creator and organizer of this earth. We are privileged inhabitants.

He has a very choice spot of land where He has planted 12 olive trees. Perhaps the choice land today is where you live—your stake, your ward, your home, your dorm, your neighborhood, and even your country.

Now what might be the 12 olive trees that the nobleman wished to protect? I believe the 12 olive trees are families. The olive tree figures realistically and figuratively in the gospel, the scriptures, and the life of the Savior as an object of value and sacredness. For example, the olive tree produces olive oil, which is a symbol of purity. In the days of Noah a dove brought back an actual olive leaf to signify that the waters of the flood were abated from the earth. And Jesus Christ spent His final hours among

the olive trees of the Garden of Gethsemane. I truly believe we, as individuals and families, could be considered the favored, valued, sacred olive trees; we are to be protected.

In addition to the trees and the nobleman, there was a watchman, and he was to stand on a tower. I believe the watchmen today are the prophets and apostles. The Lord has designated President Gordon B. Hinckley as our chief watchman on the tower today. We will be guided and protected from the enemy if we follow his counsel. President Boyd K. Packer is also a watchman on the tower. His biography, written several years ago, is entitled *Boyd K. Packer: A Watchman on the Tower*.² Trusted local priesthood leaders, including stake presidents and bishops, are watchmen on the tower to their members and congregations. Certainly a father is a watchman on the tower to his family. Each of you should be a watchman to yourself.

Now, what of the servants? They are the worker bees. They are all of us today. Every member of the Church could be deemed to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we were baptized, we took upon ourselves, by covenant, the name of Jesus Christ and agreed to always remember Him and to keep His commandments. Being a member of the Church and serving in various callings and responsibilities implies that we are servants. We should be willing and prepared to do all that is asked of us.

In the Holy Land (and I have personally seen them) are remnants or remains of ancient towers—round structures built of rock, like lighthouses near the sea. The purpose of these towers was to provide a structure or facility where the watchman might look out upon the land and see the enemy before he came and destroyed the olive trees.

Then what might be analogous to the tower today? The tower is a symbolic point of elevation where we may see the enemy before others do. I think today's towers might be revelation, prophets, inspired scriptures, and, certainly,

the temple. Revelation from living prophets permits us to see more clearly in a clouded world. Our modern scriptures—the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price—help us understand the Bible more fully. As compared to the world, all of these are opportunities to receive elevated instructions in a troubled world.

Every aspect of the temple, from its upward-reaching architecture to the inspired teachings and covenant-bearing ordinances, is a tower, a pinnacle of elevation.

Surrounding the olive trees and the choice land was a hedge. A hedge is a barrier. It might be a moat, a ditch, a fence, or some other device that would slow down or prevent the enemy from entering the vineyard and harming the olive trees.

I believe the hedge that can today slow down and protect us from the enemy might be the standards of the Church, such as the standards in the booklet *For the Strength of Youth*. The cautions by your parents are standards that will act as a hedge to protect you from the enemy. The counsel of your bishop and local Church leaders is a hedge. The CES Honor Code and standards for admission to this great university are a further hedge and a wonderful measure of protection to you.

Now, what of the enemy? Obviously, in the parable the enemy is Satan. That has not changed today.

Satan seeks to destroy. Early in the Prophet Joseph Smith's ministry the Lord warned Joseph of those who might attempt to alter the words of the Book of Mormon translation:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, that Satan has great hold upon their hearts; he stirreth them up to iniquity against that which is good. . . .

*Satan stirreth them up, that he may lead their souls to destruction.*³

In the parable, Satan destroyed the olive trees. Today he seeks to destroy families.

How may we protect our families today?
I offer five suggestions.

First: Listen to and follow the prophets and apostles. They will warn you of impending dangers.

On April 6, 1830, the day the Church was organized, the Lord instructed the new Church concerning the calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith:

Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.

*For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.*⁴

Like the Saints in 1830, when the Church was organized, we have need to listen to the prophets and apostles today. The world is in turmoil. There is much of wickedness, war, and confusion.

We read in the Doctrine and Covenants: “Ye hear of wars in foreign lands; but, behold, I say unto you, they are nigh, even at your doors.”⁵

Further, speaking of our generation, we read:

And in that generation shall the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

*And there shall be men standing in that generation, that shall not pass until they shall see an overflowing scourge; for a desolating sickness shall cover the land.*⁶

The great and satisfying safety in this period of “overflowing scourge” and “desolating sickness” is found in the next verse of this section, which reads as follows: “But my disciples shall stand in holy places, and shall not be moved.”⁷

This refers to modern-day prophets and apostles.

On so many social issues today, when many well-recognized faiths and organizations are caving in to popular appeal, we as a church remain firm and unchanging. Examples include gender identity, the sanctity of birth and life, morality (versus the “new morality”), the sanctity of the body, profanity, proper observance of the Sabbath Day, dress standards (versus sloppiness of dress), pornography, and many others.

We do not change. If it was wrong in Old Testament days, it is wrong today. If it was wrong in New Testament days, it is wrong today. All this because we have living prophets who “stand in holy places, and [are not] moved.”

The Lord anticipated this when the Church was organized through the Prophet Joseph Smith. We read in the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants:

They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall.

Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments;

And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets. . . .

And after having received the record of the Nephites, yea, even my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., might have power to translate through the mercy of God, by the power of God, the Book of Mormon.

And also those to whom these commandments were given, might have power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the

*Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually.*⁸

There is one other area today where we need to be guided by prophets and apostles. In the current political arena that we find ourselves in today, there is much confusion in the world about who we are. Right now our Church—and, by implication, all our members—is under a big microscope, and the world is looking in. “Who are these Mormons?” they inquire.

Some of us may interpret this inquiry as persecution, but, in reality, it is just confusion on the part of the inquirer.

Speaking of persecution, President Gordon B. Hinckley recently counseled General Authorities to not worry about being persecuted. He noted that it has been going on since the War in Heaven. He further counseled us that the Church is in good condition and that we should just work harder to move the work forward. He concluded by saying that he would worry more about us if people did not speak evil of us. This is good counsel from a prophet.

Second: Be grateful the Church has provided towers. Revelation from on high is for our benefit, especially modern-day revelation received through living prophets.

The inspired scriptures are to help us see the enemy and be prepared before he comes. Are we continuing to read the Book of Mormon daily, as counseled by President Gordon B. Hinckley in 2005? Are we pondering the scriptures and incorporating their truths into our lives?

Those of us who are privileged to enter temples and participate in sacred ordinances know that they are truly towers where we are warned and where we will see and can distinguish the enticings of Satan before they engulf us.

Speaking of temples, Ezekiel wrote, “And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.”⁹

Regular temple worship will protect our families from Satan.

Third: Keep the standards. Remember the hedge. Especially you young adults, carry a copy of *For the Strength of Youth* with you at all times. It comes in two sizes: one for your wallet and the other for your scriptures. I have always carried the small *For the Strength of Youth* in my wallet.

Live the standards. Be clean. President Hinckley has warned the youth and young adults over and over again of the evils of pornography. Pornography can destroy you just as the enemy destroyed the olive trees.

There are so many uplifting gospel standards today to help us. None should be viewed as limitations of personal freedom. They should be seen as a hedge of protection against an encroaching enemy. Consider these standards:

1. I will choose the right. I know I can repent when I make a mistake.
2. I will use the names of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ reverently. I will not swear or use crude words.
3. I will do those things on the Sabbath that will help me feel close to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.
4. I will keep my mind and body sacred and pure, and I will not partake of things that are harmful to me.
5. I will dress modestly to show respect for Heavenly Father and myself.
6. I will only read and watch those things that are pleasing to Heavenly Father.
7. I will only listen to music that is pleasing to Heavenly Father.
8. I will seek good friends and treat others kindly.

One of the strongest hedges that all of you have is the counsel of your parents. Honor and listen to your parents. Be cooperative. Be happy. Make your home, whether you live

with or away from your parents, truly a choice spot of land where the Lord can allow you, a precious olive tree, to grow and develop free from Satan's influence.

Fourth: Believe that you are like an olive tree of old; that is, you are precious. You are a member of the restored Church. Do you truly realize the great blessing that has come into your life to be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

This Church is the only true church on the face of the earth today. It is the only place where we can go for revelation from living prophets. It is the only place where we can enter into sacred covenants administered by men who hold the holy Melchizedek Priesthood.

The Lord told Moses: "I have a work for thee, Moses, my son; and thou art in the similitude of mine Only Begotten; and mine Only Begotten is and shall be the Savior, for he is full of grace and truth."¹⁰

Do you believe that the Lord has a work for you to do? Do you believe that you are in the similitude of the Only Begotten, who is Jesus Christ?

I bear witness and testimony that each of you is a special olive tree in the eyes of the Lord. He loves you.

And now, in conclusion:

Fifth: Remember the responsibility of being a faithful servant. In the parable the servants began to second-guess. They wondered if the nobleman really had need of a tower. They thought that maybe it was such

a time of peace that there was no need to build the tower and protect the olive trees.

They began to be at variance one with another. They became slothful. They hearkened not unto the commandments of their Lord, and they fell asleep. They were wrong.

We must be certain that we, as servants, humble, ordinary members of the Church—parents, youth, children, leaders, and teachers—not fall asleep in performing tasks assigned to us from the Lord.

I believe if we are faithful servants, we will truly see the enemy come before he can destroy our families.

I bear my testimony that you will be protected from the evils of Satan if you look for the watchman on the tower and faithfully follow all the counsels we receive from the Lord and our leaders, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. D&C 101:44–54.
2. See Lucile C. Tate, *Boyd K. Packer: A Watchman on the Tower* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995).
3. D&C 10:20, 22.
4. D&C 21:4–6.
5. D&C 45:63.
6. D&C 45:30–31.
7. D&C 45:32.
8. D&C 1:16–18, 29–30.
9. Ezekiel 44:23.
10. Moses 1:6.