A Voice of Warning

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From an address given by President Benson at the ground-breaking service for a chapel in Hyrum, Ohio, 22 March 1986.

[Italicization is NOT original. The italicized words are verses from D&C 1]

Nearly 162 years ago when the elders of the Church were assembled in conference to determine whether the revelations should be published to the world, the Lord gave a revelation to the Church which he referred to as His “preface” to His book of revelations. This revelation, section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants, prepares the reader, as a preface to a book should, with an explanation of the purpose of the Author in giving the revelations contained in it. The Author of the Doctrine and Covenants is the Lord Jesus Christ, through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Doctrine and Covenants is unique among the standard works of the Church not only in its authorship but in that it is a modern book of scripture.

The introduction of the preface includes an invitation to all mankind, especially members of his Church, to heed the revelations, for the “voice of warning” shall be unto all people. (D&C 1:4.)

The angel Moroni quoted to the Prophet several Bible prophecies indicating that certain judgments were to come in the last days and that these predictions were not yet fulfilled, but were soon to be:

“And they shall go forth and none shall stay them, for I the Lord have commanded them.
“Behold, this is mine authority, and the authority of my servants, and my preface unto the book of my commandments, which I have given them to publish unto you, O inhabitants of the earth.

“Therefore, fear and tremble, O ye people, for what I the Lord have decreed in them shall be fulfilled.” (D&C 1:1-7)

In these next three verses, the Lord reminds all men of the power He has given His servants who carry the message of this dispensation:

“And verily I say unto you, that they who go forth, bearing these tidings unto the inhabitants of the earth, to them is power given to seal both on earth and in heaven, the unbelieving and rebellious;

“Yea, verily, to seal them up unto the day when the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the wicked without measure—

“Unto the day when the Lord shall come to recompense unto every man according to his work, and measure to every man according to the measure which he has measured to his fellow man.” (D&C 1:8–10.)

There follows in several verses the reasons why the Lord directs His message to this generation:

“Therefore the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear:

“Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come, for the Lord is nigh;

“And the anger of the Lord is kindled, and his sword is bathed in heaven, and it shall fall upon the inhabitants of the earth.

“And the arm of the Lord shall be revealed; and the
day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people;

“For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant;

“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, [page 4] even Babylon the great, which shall fall.” (D&C 1:11–16.)

The Lord then reveals why Joseph Smith was called to restore the gospel. He also indicates how this calling will bless all mankind:

“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—

“The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh—

“But that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world;

“That faith also might increase in the earth;

“That mine everlasting covenant might be established;

“That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers.” (D&C 1:17–23.)

The Church had been organized for over one year, and many had been blessed in accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ as restored. In the next few verses, the Lord relates how people’s lives had been changed through the revelations, a blessing readers of the Doctrine and Covenants may receive today:

“Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.

“And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known; ...”

“...And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed;

“And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent;

“And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time.” (D&C 1:24–28.)

In the next two verses, the Lord mentions that He has given His servants power to bring forth the Book of Mormon, to receive revelation, and to bring forth “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth”:

“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.” (D&C 1:29–30.)

The Lord Jesus Christ warns members of his church that unrepented sins may cause the loss of the Spirit:

“For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance;

“Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven;

“And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received; for my Spirit shall not always strive with man, saith the Lord of Hosts.” (D&C 1:31–33.)

We now read that peace will be taken from the earth and that Satan will reign. But the Lord will have power over His Saints:

“And again, verily I say unto you, O
inhabitants of the earth: I the Lord am willing to make these things known unto all flesh;
“For I am no respecter of persons, and will that all men shall know that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet, but [page 5] is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion.
“And also the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst, and shall come down in judgment upon ... the world.” (D&C 1:34–36.)

In conclusion, the Lord testifies that the revelations are true and the prophecies in them will be fulfilled. Furthermore, that which He gives to His appointed servants shall be His voice, and the Spirit bears witness of the truth of the Lord’s revelations and commandments:

“Search these commandments, for they are true and faithful, and the prophecies and promises which are in them shall all be fulfilled.
“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.
“For behold, and lo, the Lord is God, and the Spirit beareth record, and the record is true, and the truth abideth forever and ever. Amen.” (D&C 1:37–39.)

My purpose in sharing these words of the Lord regarding the condition of the world in the latter days is this:

Today we as a church are sounding the voice of warning through our missionaries to the nations of all the earth. We send our missionaries to proclaim the gospel to those who will receive our message. We hope that every young man who is listening has plans to be a messenger for the Lord.

We have some difficult days ahead. The Lord has forecast calamities that will befall the nations of the world because of their disobedience to and disregard of His commandments and revelations. In His great love and mercy, He has raised up the Prophet Joseph Smith and other servants to proclaim His gospel in order that faith will increase and the Lord may establish His everlasting covenant among all mankind.

The everlasting covenant is His gospel.
Several declarations in this revelation will strengthen each member of the Church if we will heed them. Remember, these are the words of the Lord to His Church today.
First: The mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith is God-directed.
Second: The revelations received by Joseph Smith are commandments from the Lord Himself.
Third: These commandments were given to the servants of God “in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.” (D&C 1:24.)
Fourth: The Book of Mormon was translated through the mercy of God, by the power of God.
Fifth: Joseph Smith and his successors were commanded to organize the only true and living church, after a long period of its being in obscurity and darkness. The Church, as restored, is now recognized as a great influence for good.
Sixth: The Lord is pleased with the Church collectively, but not necessarily with all individual members of the Church. We only please Him when we obey His commandments.
Seventh: Even though peace has been taken from the earth and Satan will have great power, the Lord will have power over His Saints and “shall reign in their midst.”
Finally: All the words of the Lord will be fulfilled, whether He gives the words Himself or through inspiration and revelation to His servants to declare those words; and the Holy Spirit bears testimony to all who seek to know the truth of the revelations and commandments.

My brothers and sisters, I give you my testimony that this church—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—is the Lord’s church. He is pleased with its progress.
I testify that He is close to His servants—He does reign in our midst through His appointed servants. I testify that His direction is received by His First Presidency today.
Joseph Smith is a true prophet. He laid the foundation of this church, and the Lord has blessed and honored him.
The Doctrine and Covenants is true, for its ultimate source is Jesus Christ, and His message is for all men.
May God bless us all to be true and faithful to the commandments of the Lord.