The Things of Eternity—
Stand We in Jeopardy?

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Ensign, Jan. 1977, pp. 3-7

Over the years as my thoughts and heart have turned to the lives of my noble ancestors, my appreciation for them has increased. Learning about my ancestors has not only turned my heart to them, but has helped me see eternity more clearly. My own life is rooted not just in the present, but in the lives of my ancestors as well.

I remember reading a message that Grandfather Kimball wrote to his children, in which he said, “I only care for the things of eternity. When I behold the great things of God and the glory which awaits the righteous, and when I reflect that the road is so straight that but few find it, I feel to pray the Lord to bless my children and save them. I am thankful to God because I live in a day when some will find it and will become Gods.” (Orson F. Whitney, Life of Heber C. Kimball, Bookcraft, 1945, p. 513.)

If we live in such a way that the considerations of eternity press upon us, we will make better decisions. Perhaps this is why President Brigham Young once said that if he could do but one thing to bless the Saints, he believed it would be to give them “eyes with which to see things as they are.” (Journal of Discourses, 3:221; italics added.) It is interesting to note how those last words reflect the words of the scripture in which truth is described as “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.” (D&C 93:24.) Jacob reminds us also that “the Spirit speaketh the truth … of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be.” (Jacob 4:13.)

The more clearly we see eternity, the more obvious it becomes that the Lord’s work in which we are engaged is one vast and grand work with striking similarities on each side of the veil.

We have great works to perform on this earth, and I suppose the whole program of the Church could be put in one of three categories: missionary work, temple work, and keeping Church members active and faithful. It is hard to overemphasize the value and importance of any one of these activities. Our great and growing missionary program among mortals is the most extensive it has ever been in this dispensation as we preach, teach, and baptize tens of thousands of our fellowmen. However, missionary work is not limited to proclaiming the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people now living on the earth. Missionary work is also continuing beyond the veil among the millions and even billions of the children of our Heavenly Father who have died either without hearing the gospel or without accepting it while they lived on the earth. Our great part in this aspect of missionary work is to perform on this earth the ordinances required for those who accept the gospel over there. The spirit world is full of spirits who are anxiously awaiting the performance of these earthly ordinances for them. I hope to see us dissolve the artificial boundary line we so often place between missionary work and temple and genealogical work, because it is the same great redemptive work!

During the span of ages there have been periods of time when the Lord has gathered his people together and established the gospel and certain of the ordinances of salvation among them. These we call gospel dispensations, each headed by one or more prophets who held the holy priesthood and the keys authorizing the exercise of that priesthood. We honor them for their noble and inspired works of righteousness. We see that in each [page 4] dispensation prior to our own, certain aspects of the work of salvation for all the larger family of God have been introduced and a part of the labor completed.

In our own dispensation, which the scriptures have identified as the dispensation of the fulness of times, the Lord has promised that he would “gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.” (D&C 27:13; see also Eph. 1:10.)

Certainly gathering “together in one all things” is related to the apostle Peter’s statement regarding the “times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:21.) This very important prophecy refers especially to the return of those prophets of old who held the various priesthood keys of the kingdom.

Thus, the keys of the divine patriarchal order which were held by the fathers anciently were restored, saying, in effect, that the time had finally come for Abraham’s great lineage to be restored to the gospel and the priesthood. Through this priesthood “shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Abr. 2:11)—meaning in part that the blessings of the gospel are brought to individuals and also that, through the priesthood’s new and everlasting covenant of marriage, all the elect
children of God who are gathered together out of the earth may be sealed together in family units into the lineage of Abraham, or, in other words, into the organized, eternal family of God.

Is it any wonder that the organization and work of the Church and its priesthood in this day are patterned after the keys it possesses? We are a missionary Church, participating to the fullest possible extent in the gathering of Israel. We are a Church founded upon families; a Church that takes care of its own, stressing the economic, intellectual, and spiritual development of its families and individual members in preparation for salvation in the kingdom of heaven. And we are a Church that is actively engaged in temple and genealogy work for ourselves and for the infinite numbers of our Father’s children who have the promise, but not as yet the opportunity, for the ordinances of salvation. This is a work that makes even more meaningful the great corresponding missionary work being carried out in the spirit world.

Time and time again when I have read certain passages in the Bible pertaining to this work, I have been struck by the forceful questions Paul posed when he asked the Corinthian saints:

“Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?” (1 Cor. 15:29–30; italics added.)

Paul’s last question has caused me much reflection in recent months. Why do the peoples of the world stand in jeopardy? Because they cannot be saved without their families and their associates. They will continue to stand in jeopardy until the gospel is taken to them in such a way that they are willing either to receive it or reject it. This responsibility also places us in jeopardy so far as missionary work is concerned if we don’t share the gospel with them.

At the same time, we as members of the Church also stand in jeopardy if we do not do our temple work. Much of our time is taken up with the mundane details of everyday living, which must be done, of course; but those who are members of His kingdom at this critical time should endeavor to give much time and effort to this important work.

These things of eternity pertaining to the spirit world and the hereafter were on the mind of the Savior when he was crucified. This is reflected in his statement to the repentant thief, which has puzzled many people:

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.”

“But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?”

“And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man [the Christ] hath done nothing amiss.”

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:39–43.)

What did He mean? He meant exactly what He said. The hours would pass, death would come to them all, they would go into another world, and “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

You will remember also that when the woman came to the tomb of the buried Savior, the Savior was not in his tomb. When he met her in the garden, he said, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father [in heaven]: but … I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” (John 20:17.) He had still not been to see his Heavenly Father, so he hadn’t gone directly to the heaven we think of. He had gone some other place.

And then Peter explains to us later just where the Savior went and for what purpose.

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

“By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison. …

“For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” (1 Pet. 3:18–19, 1 Pet. 4:6.)

He provided the opportunity whereby they might repent of their sins, change their attitudes and their lives, and live according to God in the spirit. We do not know how many millions of spirits are involved. We know that many have passed away in wars, pestilence, and in various accidents. We know that the spirit world is filled with the spirits of men who are waiting for you and me to get busy—waiting as the signers of the Declaration of Independence waited. “Why,” they asked President Wilford Woodruff, “why do you keep us waiting?” That question continues to be asked of us also, by our own people.

We wonder about our progenitors—grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, etc. What do they think of you and me? We are their offspring. We have the responsibility to do their temple work, and the beautiful temples of the Lord stand day after day, yet we do not fill them always. We have a grave responsibility
that we cannot avoid, and may stand in jeopardy if we fail to do this important work.

I hope our Saints will understand the glorious reality of it all: that as the work in our temples is done in this world, it helps to prepare us for another and better world.

The temples are reserved for sacred ordinances pertaining to the living and the dead. Worthy members of the Church should go to the temples as often as possible to participate in this important work. One of the ordinances performed in the temple is that of the endowment, which comprises a course of instruction relating to the eternal journey of man and woman from the preearthly existence through the earthly experience and on to the exaltation each may attain.

Brigham Young has indicated the following concerning the endowment:

“Let me give you a definition in brief. Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the house of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels ... and gain your eternal exaltation.”

(Discourses of Brigham Young, Deseret Book, 1954, p. 416.)

Because of the sacred nature of the endowment and the other ordinances performed in the temple, those who go to the temple to receive them must be prepared and worthy. People who are converted to the Church often feel enthusiastic about going to the temple immediately after their baptism. But it takes time for them to adjust their thinking to things of an eternal nature, and it takes time for them to adjust their lives so that they are prepared and worthy when they do attend the temple. Thus, we have counseled stake presidents and bishops not to recommend people to go to the temple to receive their endowments until they are sufficiently mature in the gospel. We have established a policy that new converts should prepare themselves for at least one year after baptism before receiving these additional ordinances and blessings.

We are also concerned that our temples not become desecrated by improper actions.

The words “the Lord’s house” appear on each of the temples. A temple is the Lord’s house, and when we enter his house, we enter as his guests. Thus, we should do everything possible to keep the Lord’s house holy, unpolluted, clean, and sweet.

Some of the ancient temples were desecrated by the actions of outsiders. The Temple of Solomon, for example, was desecrated by those without authority who walked into the temple, robbed it of its precious treasures, and took those treasures to foreign lands for use in idolatrous practices. But the possible actions of outsiders are not the only potential polluters of holy places.

Holy temples may also be defiled and desecrated by members of the Church who go into the temple and make covenants unworthily or which they are not prepared or willing to accept and carry forward. When people go to the temple and then make light of its sacred principles, they are defiling it. When unrepentant people accept the holy ordinances without full determination to prove worthy of them, they are helping to violate the sacredness of the holy temple and they are desecrating holy places.

When promises are made and covenants are entered into without serious or pure intent to magnify them, pollutions may occur in the holy temples. It is not only a matter of receiving a recommend to enter the temples of the Lord, but it is also a matter of one having a pure, sweet, and repentant spirit as well. When we enter the door of the house of the Lord, we might well remember a theme that was mentioned in the Washington Temple:

Enter this door as if the floor within were gold;
And every wall of jewels all of wealth untold;
As if a choir in robes of fire were singing here;
Nor shout nor rush but hush ... for God is here.

(From “Words of Life,” p. 45.)

Some of us have had occasion to wait for someone or something for a minute, an hour, a day, a week, or even a year. Can you imagine how our progenitors must feel, some of whom have perhaps been waiting for decades and even centuries for the temple work to be done for them? I have tried, in my mind’s eye, to envision our progenitors who are anxiously waiting for those of us who are their descendants and are members of the Church on the earth to do our duty toward them. I have also thought what a dreadful feeling it would be for us to see them in the hereafter and have to acknowledge that we had not been as faithful as we should have been here on earth in performing these ordinances in their behalf.

During the past few months I have been privileged to attend the rededication of a number of our temples. Perhaps the Lord permits us to hold such rededication services so that we can sit in the temple and think and reflect and ponder on the things we ought to be doing. As a result of such experiences, I have resolved to continue to give of myself and my energies to this great and important work and encourage others to do likewise.

Recently I have felt impressed to share some
thoughts about the work for the dead because I feel the same urgency for it that I do about missionary work, since they are basically one and the same. To my knowledge, there has never been another time in this dispensation when we have had four temples at various stages of planning and construction as we now have, together with the refurbishing and rededication of others. Thus, I said to my Brethren of the General Authorities, “This work is constantly on my mind, for it must be carried forward.”

Having in mind the importance of temple work, wouldn’t it be wonderful if every Latter-day Saint home had in the bedroom of each boy and each girl, or on the mantle of the living room, a fairly good-sized picture of a temple which would help them recall, frequently, the purpose of these beautiful edifices. I believe there would be far more marriages in the temple than there are today, because the children would have as a part of their growing experience the picture of one of our temples constantly before them as a reminder and a goal. I recommend that to the Saints. It is almost costless and certainly would help develop the thinking processes of little minds that are growing, as the temple and its meaning is contemplated and is discussed in the family home evening.

This is the work of the Lord, and he has given it to us. It is our responsibility, our pleasure, and our privilege to carry this work forward. We should so organize ourselves and the work that it will go forward in leaps and bounds. In the book of Revelation, John saw that sometime in the future (and it is still in the future to us), those who were faithful and have cleansed their lives will work night and day in the holy temples. Evidently there will be then a constant succession of groups going through the temple somewhat like it was in the days of the Nauvoo Temple. My grandfather, Heber C. Kimball, wrote in his journal that during the last days of February 1846, groups were going through the Nauvoo Temple night and day, “way into the night and way into the day,” he said. He indicated that Brother Brigham took a group through, Brother Willard took a group through, and he took a group through, and so on. The faithful Saints then were so anxious that they should receive the numerous blessings and ordinances which are given in the temple that they virtually lived in the temple those last few hours before they crossed the plains. Today we should begin to act with that same fervor and desire.

We have asked the members of the Church to further the work of turning the hearts of the children to the fathers by getting their sacred family records in order. These records, including especially the “book containing the records of our dead” (D&C 128:24), are a portion of the “offering in righteousness” referred to by Malachi (Mal. 3:3), which we are to present in His holy temple, and without which we shall not abide the day of His coming.

We also have asked that the families of the Church organize themselves to perform more efficiently their sacred missionary, welfare, home education, temple, and genealogical responsibilities and to set the pattern for things to come. I recall it was said that the last public words of my grandfather, Heber C. Kimball, were to the effect that the time had come for all men to set their houses in order.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said: “Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory! Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceedingly glad.” (D&C 128:22.)

My prayer for all of us who are members of the Church in this great dispensation of the fulness of times is that we might indeed go forward in this great work so that we will not stand in jeopardy of our eternal reward.