



Hope through the Atonement of Jesus Christ

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Real hope is much more than wishful musing. It stiffens, not slackens, the spiritual spine.



Brothers and sisters, I am very grateful to be with you today. My pate is still somewhat shiny, but not because my barber friends have magnified their calling. Rather, it reflects more treatments, which are encouraging in spite of my alternating conference hairstyles.

My gratitude continues to flow--foremost to the Lord, then to my special wife and family, competent and caring doctors and nurses, and so many friends and members who pray in my behalf.

For a variety of reasons, brothers and sisters, today's society seems to struggle in order to be *hopeful*. The associated causes and effects comingle ever so subtly.

Our everyday usage of the word *hope* includes how we "hope" to arrive at a certain destination by a certain time. We "hope" the world economy will improve. We "hope" for the visit of a loved one. Such typify our sincere but proximate hopes.

Life's disappointments often represent the debris of our failed, proximate hopes. Instead, however, I speak of the crucial need for ultimate hope.

Ultimate hope is a different matter. It is tied to Jesus and the blessings of the great Atonement, blessings resulting in the universal Resurrection and the precious opportunity provided thereby for us to practice emancipating repentance, making possible what the scriptures call "a perfect brightness of hope" (2 Ne. 31:20).

Moroni confirmed: "What is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ" (Moro. 7:4041; see also Alma 27:28). Real hope, therefore, is not associated with things mercurial, but rather with things immortal and eternal!

Unsurprisingly, hope is intertwined with other gospel doctrines, especially faith and patience.

Just as doubt, despair, and desensitization go together, so do faith, hope, charity, and patience. The latter qualities must be carefully and constantly nurtured, however, whereas doubt and despair, like dandelions, need little encouragement in order to sprout and spread. Alas, despair comes so naturally to the natural man!

Patience, for example, permits us to deal more evenly with the unevenness of life's experiences.

Faith and hope are constantly interactive and are not always easily or precisely distinguished. Nevertheless, ultimate hope's expectations are "with surety" true (Ether 12:4; see also Rom. 8:24; Heb. 11:1; Alma 32:21). Yet in the geometry of the restored theology, hope corresponds to faith but sometimes has a greater circumference. Faith, in turn, constitutes "the assurance of things hoped for" and the proof of "things not seen" (JST, Heb. 11:1; see also Ether 12:6). Thus hope sometimes reconnoiters beyond the present boundaries of faith, but it always radiates from Jesus.

No wonder souls can be stirred and rallied by real hope's "reveille" as by no other music. Even if a few comrades slumber or desert, "lively hope" is still there "smiling brightly before us" ("We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet," *Hymns*, no. 19; see also 1 Pet. 1:3). Hope caused downcast disciples to go quickly and expectantly to an empty garden tomb (see Mark 16:18; Luke 24:8,12). Hope helped a prophet to see rescuing rain in a distant cloud which appeared to be no larger than a man's hand (see 1 Kgs. 18:41-46).

Such ultimate hope constitutes the "anchor of the soul" and is retained through the gift of the Holy Ghost and faith in Christ (Heb. 6:19; see also Alma 25:16; Ether 12:9). In contrast, viewing life without the prospect of immortality can diminish not only hope but also the sense of personal accountability (see 1 Cor. 5:19; Alma 30:18).

Granted, the human scene includes many individuals who go decently about life's labors, untouched by or unexpressive of deep religious feelings, but who, nevertheless, draw unknowingly upon "the light of Christ," which to a degree lights every individual (see D&C 84:46; Moro. 7:16, 18; John 1:9). Commendably, other individuals have openly acknowledged spiritual intimations which sustain them.

Nevertheless, because proximate hopes are so vulnerable to irony and the unexpected, there is an increasing and profound sense of existential despair in the world. A grumpy cynicism now pervades politics. Many feel burdened by society's other accumulating anxieties.

Even those who are spiritually secure themselves can sense the chill in the air. Cold secularism causes some of that shivering, as many have given in to what Senator Patrick Moynihan called "defining deviancy down" ("Defining Deviancy Down," *The American Scholar*, winter 1993, 17). Much despair truly comes of iniquity--but as *God* defines iniquity (see Moro. 10:22).

There is so much unsettlement and divisiveness. No wonder the subsequent loss of hope almost inevitably sends selfishness surging as many, resignedly, turn to pleasing themselves.

When hope is stripped away, Paul noted this tendency for some to eat and drink, reasoning that "for to morrow we die," driven by the erroneous conclusion that "when a man [is] dead, that [is] the end thereof" (1 Cor. 15:32; Alma 30:18).

Much as I lament the gathering storms, there will be some usefulness in them. Events will help to draw fresh attention to God's higher ways and His kingdom, which is to "become fair as the sun, and clear as the moon" (D&C 105:31).

Individuals and nations will continue to choose what they want, but they cannot alter the ultimate consequences of what they want.

Therefore, in this hastened ripening process, let us not be surprised that the tares are looking more like tares all the time. During this time when nations are in distress, with perplexity, there will actually be some redemptive turbulence: "For the kingdom of the devil must shake, and they which belong to it must needs be stirred up unto repentance" (2 Ne. 28:19).

Being so "stirred up" will be a real thing, though we can only speculate as to how it will be achieved.

Meanwhile, those with ultimate hope accept the truth of this terse verse: "But all things must come to pass in their time" (D&C 64:32).

It is well, therefore, to ponder the status of hope in our present human context when God's commandments seem unimportant to many. Granted, as the scriptures say, "it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right" (Mosiah 29:26). But if this does occur, bringing massive sea changes in society's attitudes, then the judgments of God will come (see Mosiah 29:26, 27). Only the acceptance of the revelations of God can bring both the direction and correction needed and, in turn, a "brightness of hope" (2 Ne. 31:20).

Real hope keeps us "anxiously engaged" in good causes even when these appear to be losing causes on the mortal scoreboard (see D&C 58:27). Likewise, real hope is much more than wishful musing. It stiffens, not slackens, the spiritual spine. Hope is serene, not giddy, eager without being naive, and pleasantly steady without being smug. Hope is realistic anticipation which takes the form of a determination--not only to survive adversity but, moreover, to "endure . . . well" to the end (D&C 121:8).

Though otherwise a "lively" attribute, hope stands quietly with us at funerals. Our tears are just as wet, but not because of despair. Rather, they are tears of heightened appreciation evoked by poignant separation. Those tears of separation change, ere long, becoming tears of glorious anticipation.

Real hope inspires quiet Christian service, not flashy public fanaticism. Finley Peter Dunne impishly observed, "A fanatic is a man who does what he thinks the Lord would do if He knew the facts" (quoted in *The Third--And Possibly the Best--637 Best Things Anybody Ever Said*, comp. Robert Byrne [1986], no. 549).

Indeed, when we are unduly impatient with an omniscient God's timing, we really are suggesting that we know what is best. Strange, isn't it--we who wear wristwatches seek to counsel Him who oversees cosmic clocks and calendars.

Because God wants us to come home after having become more like Him and His Son, part of this developmental process, of necessity, consists of showing unto us our weaknesses. Hence, if we have ultimate hope we will be submissive, because, with His help, those weaknesses can even become strengths (see Ether 12:27).

It is not an easy thing, however, to be shown one's weaknesses, as these are regularly demonstrated by life's circumstances. Nevertheless, this is part of coming unto Christ, and it is a vital, if painful, part of God's plan of happiness. Besides, as Elder Henry B. Eyring has wisely observed, "If you want praise more than instruction, you may get neither" ("To Choose and Keep a Mentor," *Addresses Delivered at the 1993 Annual University Conference, Brigham Young University* [1993], 42).

By pressing forward hopefully, we can, repeatedly and joyfully, stand on what was yesterday's distant horizon, thereby drawing even further hope from our very own experiences. Hence Paul described how "tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope" (Rom. 5:34). Therefore, we rightly sing of God, "We've proved him in days that are past" (*Hymns*, no. 19).

Granted, those with true hope still see their personal circumstances shaken at times--like a kaleidoscope. Yet with the "eye of faith," even in their changed, proximate circumstances, they still see divine design (see Alma 5:15).

The truly hopeful, for instance, work amid surrounding decay at having strong and happy families. Their response is the steady, Joshua response: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15).

We may not be able to fix the whole world, but we can strive to fix what may be amiss in our own families. Tolkien reminds us: "It is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule" (*The Return of the King* [1965], 190).

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in our own little family plots, we can bequeath to the succeeding generations "clean earth to till"! Thus not only does charity begin at home, but so does hope!

Whatever our particular furrow, we can, in Paul's words, "plow in hope," not looking back, and refusing to let yesterday hold tomorrow hostage (1 Cor. 9:10).

Genuine, ultimate hope helps us to be more loving even while the love of many waxes cold (see Matt. 24:12). We are to be more holy, even as the world ripens in iniquity; more courteous and patient in a coarsening and curt world, and to be of strong hearts even when the hearts of others fail them (see Moro. 10:22).

Hope can be contagious, especially if we are to be "ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh . . . a reason of the hope that is in [us]" (1 Pet. 3:15). Said President Brigham Young, if we do not impart knowledge to others and do good, we "will become contracted in [our] views and feelings" (*Deseret News Weekly*, 9 May 1855, 68).

If we look for specific things we can do, the Holy Ghost will direct us, showing unto us "all things" which we should do, for this is one of His inspiring roles (see 2 Ne. 32:5). Our opportunities for helping others who have lost hope may be no further away than in our own extended families, a discouraged neighbor next door, or someone just around the corner. By helping a child learn to read, visiting a lonely patient in a nursing home, or by simply running an errand for a busy but overwhelmed parent, so much can be imparted to others. Likewise, a simple gospel conversation can impart hope. Meanwhile, never mind that the world will become more bipolar as between those who are secular and permissive and those who hold to spiritual values.

Therefore, being blessed with hope ourselves, let us, as disciples, rather than being contracted, reach out, including to those who, for whatever reason, have "moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:23).

As in Charles Wesley's words in the hymn "Come Let Us Anew," our lives and times do glide swiftly away, and our glide paths vary widely, as we all know. But all those who prevail "by the patience of hope and the labor of love" will hear the glorious words, "'Well and faithfully done; Enter into my joy and sit down on my throne'" (*Hymns*, no. 217).

May this glorious moment one day be ours to claim, through the gospel of hope--in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

◀ Previous | Next ▶