

Waiting on the Lord

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Faith means trusting God in good times and bad, even if that includes some suffering until we see His arm revealed in our behalf.

My beloved brothers and sisters, we are all eager—no one more than I—to hear concluding remarks from our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. This has been a marvelous conference, but it is the second time that COVID-19 has altered our traditional proceedings.

I was very glad when Elder Holland started off his talk with this. Too many leaders and members of the church want to pretend like its business as usual. Like this is “the new normal”. Elder Holland flat out acknowledges there is nothing normal or traditional about the last two conferences.

We are so tired of this contagion, we feel like tearing our hair out. And apparently, some of my Brethren have already taken that course of action. Please know that we do pray constantly for those who have been affected in any way, especially for any who have lost loved ones. Everyone agrees that this has gone on much, much too long.

Once again, this last sentence was something that needed to be said and the ambiguity and choice of words here I believe is intentional and I believe is warranted- “this” has gone on much too long.

How long do we wait for relief from hardships that come upon us? What about enduring personal trials while we wait and wait, and help seems so slow in coming? Why the delay when burdens seem more than we can bear?

These are important questions to ask at this time. *Understanding Isaiah, The Parable of the Nobleman and the Olive Trees, A test, a Test, a TEST!, Understanding Revelation: Chapters 1-3, Joseph being sold into Egypt as a type, etc etc-* there is a very good chance that we are entering this time period or already have. We know from Joseph being sold into Egypt as a type and Isaiah that no relief comes for at least two years. If your answer is “I can survive a week, a month or a year”, it might not be enough. We need to evaluate and re-evaluate our lives while there is still time and make the changes and preparations that will enable us to endure longer and with more patience.

While asking such questions, we can, if we try, hear another’s cry echoing from a dank, dark prison cell during one of the coldest winters then on record in that locale.

“O God, where art thou?” we hear from the depths of Liberty Jail. “And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place? How long shall thy hand be stayed?” How long, O Lord, how long?

So, we are not the first nor will we be the last to ask such questions when sorrows bear down on us or an ache in our heart goes on and on.

As far as I know, when talking of this time period for us as Saints ahead, no one chose to use tribulation that the pioneers endured, no one chose to use anecdotal stories etc etc- the example of Liberty Jail was used over and over again. All of those papers I listed up above, once again, should be coming into focus in scope and severity. The blessing that we have is that we do know how long. The prophets and apostles have told us to get out of debt and get a year supply of food, water, clothing and, where applicable, fuel (heating). And we know that the ten tribes begin to make their appearance two years +. If you are planning for a one week or one month or several month ordeal, re-evaluate, recalculate, and go back to the drawing board. These days ahead are to be the sorest days, which means if we haven't hit anything close to Liberty Jail then keep waiting.

I am not now speaking of pandemics or prisons but of you, your family, and your neighbors who face any number of such challenges. I speak of the yearning of many who would like to be married and aren't or who are married and wish the relationship were a little more celestial. I speak of those who have to deal with the unwanted appearance of a serious medical condition—perhaps an incurable one—or who face a lifelong battle with a genetic defect that has no remedy. I speak of the continuing struggle with emotional and mental health challenges that weigh heavily on the souls of so many who suffer with them, and on the hearts of those who love and suffer with them. I speak of the poor, whom the Savior told us never to forget, and I speak of you waiting for the return of a child, no matter what the age, who has chosen a path different from the one you prayed he or she would take.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that even this long list of things for which we might wait personally does not attempt to address the large economic, political, and social concerns that confront us collectively.

Elder Holland makes it crystal clear here that we need to enlarge our scope of understanding of what he is referring to (the days ahead). He starts with COVID and expands your mind to economic, political and social concerns- global grand-scale problems; he starts with a temporal ailment and expands it into the spiritual.

Our Father in Heaven clearly expects us to address these wrenching public issues as well as the personal ones, but there will be times in our lives when even our best spiritual effort and earnest, pleading prayers do not yield the victories for which we have yearned, whether that be regarding the large global matters or the small personal ones.

Anyone who knows anything about the Assyrian, whether they interpret the Assyrian as an actual literal invading army into the United States or interpret it economically with corporations and “idolatry kingdoms” (like I do), knows that the Assyrian gains victories. He doesn't gain these victories necessarily legally, he doesn't gain these victories without secret combinations, murder etc, but nevertheless he has victories. The Lord says that He sent the desolating sickness followed by the scourge or the Assyrian against a hypocritical nation. Those that expect political, economic, cultural, etc victories in the days ahead are sorely mistaken. Joe Biden was correct, we

are entering a dark winter, and that dark winter is the scourge, is the Assyrian and it will murder, censor, destroy, plunder, steal, throw the Saints in prison etc etc etc. Once again, those that expect victories in the days ahead, those that expect two, four, fifteen more years, I believe are sorely mistaken.

If you would ask me my honest opinion I have said that the desolating sickness is COVID and it came directly before an election. The scourge or the Assyrian rises to power because of the sickness. I believe the scourge or the Assyrian, the birth of its awakening was occurring in 2020 but would not come to power or rather would not be elected into power until the elections. We have entered a dark winter- don't expect cultural, political, economic etc wins for truth.

So while we work and wait together for the answers to some of our prayers, I offer you my apostolic promise that they are heard and they are answered, though perhaps not at the time or in the way we wanted. But they are *always* answered at the time and in the way an omniscient and eternally compassionate parent should answer them. My beloved brothers and sisters, please understand that He who never sleeps nor slumbers cares for the happiness and ultimate exaltation of His children above all else that a divine being has to do. He is pure love, gloriously personified, and Merciful Father is His name.

Elder Holland here teaches that even though we are entering into a dark winter, even though things are bad, to not lose faith in the Savior, he has a reason for doing what he is doing and is watching. He references Psalm 121 here and everyone who has read or watched my *Understanding Isaiahs* should be familiar with the word association and bring to your mind the everlasting hills, Mount Zion and New Jerusalem etc etc which is the end goal, which is the same thing that Isaiah gave the Saints, to be able to look forward to as a means of enduring the tribulations.

Psalm 121

1 I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

2 My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.

3 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.

6 The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.

8 The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

The reference in verse 6 takes you to Isaiah 49- once again, confirming the connection.

“Well, if this is the case,” you might say, “shouldn't His love and mercy simply part our personal Red Seas and allow us to walk through our troubles on dry ground? Shouldn't He send 21st-

century seagulls winging in from somewhere to gobble up all of our pesky 21st-century crickets?”

I have used this quote a lot from the Old Testament Student Manual but I don't believe I have used it enough so I'm going to throw it in here once again.

“For the disciples to suppose that they can come to this land without ought to eat, or to drink, or to wear, or anything to purchase these necessaries with, is a vain thought. For them to suppose that the Lord will open the windows of heaven, and rain down angel's food for them by the way, when their whole journey lies through a fertile country, stored with the blessings of life from His own hand for them to subsist upon, is also vain. For them to suppose that their clothes and shoes will not wear out upon the journey, when the whole of it lies through a country where there are thousands of sheep from which wool in abundance can be procured to make them garments, and cattle upon a thousand hills, to afford leather for shoes, is just as vain. ...Do not conclude from these remarks, brethren, that we doubt in the least, that the Lord will provide for His Saints in these last days; or think that we would extend our hands to steady the ark; for this is not the case. We know that the Saints have the unchangeable word of God that they shall be provided for; yet we know, if any are imprudent, or lavish, or negligent, or indolent, in taking that proper care, and making that proper use of what the Lord has made them stewards over, they are not counted wise; for a strict account of every one's stewardship is required, not only in time, but will be in eternity. Neither do we apprehend that we shall be considered putting out our hands to steady the ark of God by giving advice to our brethren upon important points relative to their coming to Zion, when the experience of almost two years' gathering, has taught us to revere that sacred word from heaven, 'Let not your flight be in haste, but let all things be prepared before you.'” (History of the Church, 1:382–83.)

The answer to such questions is “Yes, God can provide miracles instantaneously, but sooner or later we learn that the times and seasons of our mortal journey are His and His alone to direct.”

Yes, the Lord could do such things as “rain manna down from heaven” but sooner or later we will have to accept that the Lord is the one who determines the times and the seasons, which we know that in that time and in that season what to expect and we have been told how to prepare and that we will be responsible for our preparation.

He administers that calendar to every one of us individually. For every infirm man healed instantly as he waits to enter the Pool of Bethesda, someone else will spend 40 years in the desert waiting to enter the promised land. For every Nephi and Lehi divinely protected by an encircling flame of fire for their faith, we have an Abinadi burned at a stake of flaming fire for his. And we remember that the same Elijah who in an instant called down fire from heaven to bear witness against the priests of Baal is the same Elijah who endured a period when there was no rain for years and who, for a time, was fed only by the skimpy sustenance that could be carried in a raven's claw. By my estimation, that can't have been anything we would call a “happy meal.”

Elder Holland gives examples of how some things come fast, some things come slow and that there are good times and there are bad times. He also gives examples of good men dying. He explains in the next sentence:

The point? The point is that faith means trusting God in good times and bad, even if that includes some suffering until we see His arm revealed in our behalf.

Elder Holland has already mentioned Liberty Jail and now he has referenced D&C 123 (footnote 9)- we must endure suffering before the Lord's arm is revealed. Anybody who is familiar with last day timelines, word association etc should recognize enduring through suffering to see the arm of the Lord revealed.

1 Nephi 22:7-12

7 And it meaneth that the time cometh that after all the house of Israel have been scattered and confounded, that the Lord God will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles, yea, even upon the face of this land; and by them shall our seed be scattered.

8 And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto their being nourished by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders.

9 And it shall also be of worth unto the Gentiles; and not only unto the Gentiles but unto all the house of Israel, unto the making known of the covenants of the Father of heaven unto Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

10 And I would, my brethren, that ye should know that all the kindreds of the earth cannot be blessed unless he shall make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations.

11 Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations, in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel.

12 Wherefore, he will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel.

3 Nephi 16:10-20

10 And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them.

11 And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.

12 And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel.

13 But if the Gentiles will repent and return unto me, saith the Father, behold they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel.

14 And I will not suffer my people, who are of the house of Israel, to go through among them, and tread them down, saith the Father.

15 But if they will not turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, I will suffer them, yea, I will suffer my people, O house of Israel, that they shall go through among them, and shall tread them down, and they shall be as salt that hath lost its savor, which is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of my people, O house of Israel.

16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, thus hath the Father commanded me—that I should give unto this people this land for their inheritance.

17 And then the words of the prophet Isaiah shall be fulfilled, which say:

18 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing, for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

19 Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

20 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God.

The arm of the Lord being made bare in the eyes of all nations is the marvelous work and a wonder yet to come- Joseph Smith returning, the ten tribes coming etc. (see *Joseph Smith to Return, Understanding Isaiah* chapters, etc.)

That can be difficult in our modern world when many have come to believe that the highest good in life is to avoid all suffering, that no one should ever anguish over anything. But that belief will never lead us to “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

There are a lot of people right now who are teaching that the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that we are to quit our band, sell what few possessions we own, get down on our knees in our living room and pray and don't get up until you have been translated. And the purpose? To avoid the tribulation and suffering that is to be poured out. Elder Holland here says of such individuals who believe such things or teach such things, that they will never reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:13-14 (footnote 11)

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

Once again, as I have said repeatedly, God's people do not avoid suffering and tribulation, suffering and tribulation create God's people. There is no reward until **after** the trial of your

faith. So first, a test, a test, a test, first there is a trial, there is suffering, there is tribulation. And those Saints who endure, who let the suffering and tribulation purge them and purify them etc will be chosen and selected by Joseph Smith and the arm of the Lord will be made bare.

With apologies to Elder Neal A. Maxwell for daring to modify and enlarge something he once said, I too suggest that “one’s life ... cannot be both faith-filled and stress-free.” It simply will not work “to glide naively through life,” saying as we sip another glass of lemonade, “Lord, give me all thy choicest virtues, but be certain not to give me grief, nor sorrow, nor pain, nor opposition. Please do not let anyone dislike me or betray me, and above all, do not ever let me feel forsaken by Thee or those I love. In fact, Lord, be careful to keep me from all the experiences that made Thee divine. And then, when the rough sledding by everyone else is over, please let me come and dwell with Thee, where I can boast about how similar our strengths and our characters are as I float along on my cloud of comfortable Christianity.”

This was the most important declaration said over conference. Period. Elder Holland combined the quote from Elder Maxwell and the recent warnings from President Nelson about the days ahead into a single quote and laid out the truth of the matter bare enough that the simplest of minds could not misinterpret it, skew it or misrepresent it. Do you want to “let God prevail”? Do you want to “hear the voice of the Lord knocking at the door and let him in”? As Elder Holland poignantly and precisely said, you will **never** reach a fullness of Christ’s attributes or be able to stand in Christ’s presence without chastisement, tribulation, suffering, etc. The days of being a “comfortable Saint” are coming to an end. “Those who you thought were your friends will betray you and some things will simply seem unfair.” Those who think that they don’t have to put skin or blood in the game and yet think they are similar and in some cases members even think they are superior (ie. “my rainbows, butterflies, love and acceptance etc and my complete lack of opposition from my neighbors who are homosexuals, liars, cheaters, adulterers, etc, actually means I’m more like Christ”) are sorely mistaken. The time shortly ahead will see “there are only two churches and those who do not belong to the church of Christ belong to the church of the devil and will be destroyed.” Those with their pacifist ideology, their “can’t we all get along” mentality, their acceptance and welcoming into their home of gross wickedness, yea, in fine all those “suburban Mormons”, all those “lukewarm members”, are not only nothing like Christ, Christ says of such “I will spew thee from my mouth” (see *Understanding Revelation: Chapters 1-3*)

Brothers and Sisters, Elder Holland’s remarks from this point on there was no fat on them and nothing to expound upon or clarify. He spoke plainly and precisely about the need for diligence, patience and waiting and looking forward to the end goal as the means to do thus. We have already discussed all of that. With that said, I will end with reading Elder Holland’s remaining words and echo them as my own witness as I do so.

My beloved brothers and sisters, Christianity is comforting, but it is often not comfortable. The path to holiness and happiness here and hereafter is a long and sometimes rocky one. It takes time and tenacity to walk it. But, of course, the reward for doing so is monumental. This truth is taught clearly and persuasively in the 32nd chapter of Alma in the Book of Mormon. There this great high priest teaches that if the word of God is planted in our hearts as a mere seed, and if we

care enough to water, weed, nourish, and encourage it, it will *in the future* bear fruit “which is most precious, ... sweet above all that is sweet,” the consuming of which leads to a condition of no more thirst and no more hunger.

Many lessons are taught in this remarkable chapter, but central to them all is the axiom that the seed has to be nourished and we must wait for it to mature; we “[*look*] forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof.” Our harvest, Alma says, comes “by and by.” Little wonder that he concludes his remarkable instruction by repeating three times a call for *diligence* and *patience* in nurturing the word of God in our hearts, “*waiting*,” as he says, with “long-suffering ... for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you.”

COVID and cancer, doubt and dismay, financial trouble and family trials. When will these burdens be lifted? The answer is “by and by.” And whether that be a short period or a long one is not always ours to say, but by the grace of God, the blessings will come to those who hold fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ. That issue was settled in a very private garden and on a very public hill in Jerusalem long ago.

As we now hear our beloved prophet close this conference, may we remember, as Russell Nelson has demonstrated all of his life, that those who “*wait upon the Lord* shall renew their strength [and] shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; ... they shall walk, and not faint.” I pray that “by and by”—soon or late—those blessings will come to every one of you who seeks relief from your sorrow and freedom from your grief. I bear witness of God’s love and of the Restoration of His glorious gospel, which is, in one way or another, the answer to every issue we face in life. In the redeeming name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.