

Lesson 11: Preparation

*"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year –
'Give me a light that I might see my way into the unknown.'*

*He said to me – 'Step out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God.
That is better to you than a light and better than a known way.'"*

Author Unknown

IF YOU ARE PREPARED YOU SHALL NOT FEAR

Preparation is a fact of life. You got out of bed this morning and immediately began preparations for the rest of your day. High school and college years are preparation years. A mission prepares a young person for adult life. Everything from final exams to job interviews must be adequately prepared for to have a successful outcome.

The overriding event the scriptures say to prepare for is "the judgment of our God." D&C133 says, "Prepare yourselves for the great day of the Lord." Whether one lives upon the earth until the Savior's foot touches down on the Mount of Olives or dies next year, for each person there is a moment when earthly opportunities come to an end, and they come face to face with the Lord. All of our lives are a preparation for that moment. We also should prepare to be useful in his kingdom here and now in our earthly life. This does double duty, for serving our fellow man is one of the best ways to prepare for a judgment tomorrow.

PREPARING BY SPENDING TIME IN THE WORD OF GOD

The Lord knows the future. He has said, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7) The scriptures are his handbook to the future of the world. God does not leave us in the dark. He gives warnings and specific information just so we know what to prepare for and how to prepare. In Joseph Smith Matthew we read: "And whoso treasureth up my word, shall not be deceived." (JS-M 1:37) As women we have a key role in teaching our children to "treasure up," that is, love and trust in God's word so that they will use the scriptures as a guide to their own future. We set the example.

The Doctrine and Covenants was given to our day for we must prepare more than any other dispensation for the return of the Lord to the earth, and for the cataclysmic upheavals that will precede his return. Physical and spiritual preparation are both necessary.

It is surely the spiritual preparation that is most important. All men die and so will we. Surviving physically is not the issue. "They that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day." (D&C 45:57) Keeping close to the Spirit will tune our minds and hearts to the proper channel to receive the instructions we need for spiritual survival and will keep us from the "strong delusion"¹ of the last days that prophecy says will deceive so many.

Doctrine and Covenants 84 is a stern warning to the saints to beware of ignoring the scriptures they have received through the restoration. "I now give unto you a commandment to beware concerning yourselves, to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life ... For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received— Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all. And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that

¹ The "strong delusion" from 2 Thessalonians 2:11 refers to "that man of sin" (v 3) or the Anti-Christ, Satan's end times version of a savior of the world. There is only one Savior—Jesus Christ. Those who "treasure up" God's word will not be taken in by the strong delusion Satan is going to offer the world.

which I have written— That they may bring forth fruit meet for their Father's kingdom; otherwise there remaineth a scourge and judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion." (D&C 84:43-44, 54-58) This is a sobering reminder of how seriously God regards our obligation to search the words he has taken so much trouble to give us. God's hand of blessing withdraws from our lives and our "minds become darkened" when we stop studying the scriptures regularly. When we realize that we are no longer feeling close to God or getting the direction of the Spirit for our life, the most likely remedy is to re-commit to studying God's word on a regular basis.

PREPARING BY BEING OBEDIENT

In our unit on obedience, we read the only parable found in the Doctrine and Covenants—the story of the servants of the Nobleman who were commanded by their Lord to build a wall and tower around an olive orchard to protect it. (D&C 101:44-62) The servants begin to second guess these instructions. "Why spend the time and money? What's the threat?" they question. When they are defeated by a surprise attack of the enemy their master rebukes them for disobedience and tells them to build again, for there are even greater challenges ahead. Chastened, "the servant asks: When shall these things be?" (*Don't we always want to know "how much time do I have?"*) "And he said unto his servant: When[ever] I will; go ye straightway, and do all things whatsoever I have commanded you; And this shall be my seal and blessing upon you—a faithful and wise steward in the midst of mine house, a ruler in my kingdom. And his servant went straightway, and did all things whatsoever his lord commanded him; and after many days all things were fulfilled." The servants learned the hard way to obey "straightway," without picking and choosing from their Lord's commands those that they thought most "made sense" to them. Such selective obedience is not obedience at all, but lack of faith.

Obedience has been called the "first law of heaven." The rules of the game are not in doubt: "If my people will hearken unto my voice, and unto the voice of my servants whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold... they shall not be moved out of their place. But if they will not hearken to my voice, nor unto the voice of these men whom I have appointed, they shall not be blest." (D&C 124:45-46) That makes sense. If you don't obey the commandment, you don't get the blessing. But the principle of obedience reaches even deeper for those who have made covenants to obey. "If you...do not do the things that I say, I will not perform the oath which I make unto you, neither fulfil the promises which ye expect at my hands, saith the Lord. For instead of blessings, ye, by your own works, bring cursings, wrath, indignation, and judgments upon your own heads..." (D&C 124:47-48) Our obedience does not have to be perfect, but it has to reflect a willing heart. "For I, the Lord, require the hearts of the children of men." (64:22)

PREPARING BY MAKING COVENANTS

The New and Everlasting Covenant of the gospel is to "be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people, and to prepare the way before me." (D&C 45:9) A *standard* is the flag carried into battle around which an army rallies. In our day and situation, the "new and everlasting covenant" represents the rallying point for the cause of Christ². "Come to the covenant!" our missionaries tell the people of the world. "Look what Christ has offered you! Freedom from sin and guilt! Peace for the present day and security for the future! All to be had by making covenants with Jesus Christ—baptism and temple covenants." Because of these covenants, a person's sins are covered by the atonement of Jesus Christ and will not be able to be used against them by Satan, the "accuser of the brethren" at the judgment day. There is no other way to be cleansed from our sins or from the judgments that are coming upon the world except through the new and everlasting covenant. These covenants are our guarantee of ultimate victory over sin and death!

D&C 49:10 prophesies that "the nations of the earth shall bow down to it," *it* being the New and Everlasting covenant. Buddhist nations, Muslim nations, secular nations, Hindu nations—all nations shall in the end acknowledge the necessity of baptism and entering into the new and everlasting covenant with Jesus Christ in order to escape the damning nature of sin that af-

² Think of the wonderful LDS hymn, "High on the Mountain Top"—"High on the mountain top A banner is unfurled; Ye nations, now look up; It waves to all the world...etc." Number 5 in the hymnal.

fects all mankind. If they have not come to the covenant through conversion, the events of the last days will insure that “they shall come down, for that which is now exalted of itself shall be laid low of power.” (D&C 49:10) These references to “coming down,” “laid low” and “bowing” are all images of the final grand acknowledgment scene when “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess” that Jesus is the Christ, the only Savior. This image is found first in Isaiah (Isa. 45:23), and then repeated in the New Testament, Bk. of M., and D & C. Alma the Younger's version is particularly powerful, coming immediately after his dramatic conversion: “And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God (baptized) , ... Yea, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him. Yea, even at the last day, when all men shall stand to be judged of him, then shall they confess that he is God; then shall they confess, who live without God in the world, that the judgment of an everlasting punishment is just upon them; and they shall quake, and tremble, and shrink beneath the glance of his all-searching eye.” (Mosiah 27:31) There is nothing as essential in our preparation for the judgment day as making and keeping our covenants with Christ.

PREPARING BY MEMBERSHIP IN CHRIST'S CHURCH

Of course, making covenants with Jesus Christ makes you a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or what the New Testament refers to as “the kingdom of God.” When you enter the waters of baptism you become part of the body of Christ and a citizen of this kingdom. One of the key passages of the New Testament is Matthew 16:18 in which Christ states that he is going to found a church (Greek “ekklesia” meaning “called together” or “a group meeting together”) on “this rock.” (“and upon this rock I will build my church...”) From this scripture it is clear that Jesus Christ intended to found a church and that this was not an idea dreamed up later by his followers.

To that end he next says to Peter, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Clearly Christ gives to Peter authority to act in the church on earth, authority that he says will be recognized in heaven. Proper authority mattered. It is not for man to take God's authority upon himself; he must receive it from the Lord. Members of the LDS church recognize that this authority is the priesthood with its various keys.

The Doctrine & Covenants, the foundational revelation for our dispensation, contains the account of the various priesthood keys being given to Joseph Smith. In sections 128 and 110 we have a remarkable list of past prophets who came as resurrected beings—that is real, concrete persons, not figures in dreams or visions—and gave the various keys, or means of access to the various functions of the priesthood, that were required to set up a fully functioning church. Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, Peter, James and John were just some of the men who passed these “keys” or rights to the functions of the priesthood to Joseph Smith. It is a bold and unique claim, and one we, as a church, can be rightly proud to be able to make, for “... no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God.” (Hebrews 5:4) Without apology we testify to the world that the Lord has called this church to function in his authority in these last days.

PREPARING BY LEAVING BABYLON AND ENTERING ZION

Zion is the city that represents the society of the Kingdom of God lived out on the earth. It represents a culture of people who are pure in heart (D&C 97:21), and who are each “seeking the interest of his neighbor and the glory of the Lord.” (D&C 82:19) Those who live there will have arrived by first leaving Babylon, the great city that represents the principles upon which the world builds its culture and enterprises—self interest and pride. In the history of the earth there have been many attempts to live the principles that result in Zion. Enoch's people succeeded and were taken up to heaven, and as the Doctrine & Covenants tells us, they will return when the earth is in a terrestrial state. Joseph Smith received revelation that a new city of Zion would be built in North America in Jackson County, Missouri. (D&C 57:1-3) It was the hope of the early church to succeed in this enterprise but they were disappointed and told that the time had not yet arrived for Zion to be established. Nevertheless, they were sent to Jackson County to prove their obedience, prepare their hearts, and “and also that you might be honored in laying the foundation, and in bearing record of the land upon which the Zion of God shall stand.” (D&C 58:7)

PREPARING BY BEING HUMBLE AND GRATEFUL

Before the atonement of Jesus Christ, all men and women should humble themselves. Since as the Doctrine & Covenants plainly states, "all men sin," (D&C 109:34), all men have need of God's mercy and grace. Those who have received this grace are ill advised to deny mercy to their fellow men and feel proud in their hearts. For all pride begins in a feeling of superiority and self-sufficiency toward God and man. We saw in our study that one of the purposes of the judgment day will be to put everything in its proper place. That which has "exalted itself" will be brought low and those who humbled themselves will be "lifted up" or "exalted" by the Lord Jesus Christ. Every saint should remember the great debt of gratitude he owes the Savior, and extend the hand of love and forgiveness to all men so that in the great day of judgment, he will be lifted up by Christ rather than cast down.

PREPARING BY RECEIVING AND FOLLOWING REVELATION

We prepare to receive revelation by being humble and contrite: "For my Spirit is sent forth into the world to enlighten the humble and contrite, and to the condemnation of the ungodly." (D&C 136:33) Revelation and humility are connected through prayer. In the scriptures, prayer is often called "humbling yourself before the Lord." The Spirit is a light that can shine in many ways in our life, and as we humbly go to the Lord in heartfelt prayer, He will shine that light on us. It can show us where to go and what to do. We need this direction and we need always to keep the humility to recognize how much we do need direction. But there is no more important light, than the light that God shines upon our own heart as we come before Him. We read in D&C 66, "Verily I say unto you...that you are clean, but not all; repent, therefore, of those things which are not pleasing in my sight, saith the Lord, for the Lord will show them unto you...And now, verily, I, the Lord, will show unto you what I will concerning you, or what is my will concerning you." (D&C 66:3-4) Revelation like this links our life to the flow of life from Jesus Christ, the True Vine and the source from which all blessings flow to us.

PREPARING BY REPENTING

Once God has shown us through revelation, either in His word or through the Spirit, what is displeasing in his sight, the next step is repentance, or cleansing. If we are to be prepared for the Second Coming we must be cleansed from our sins because Christ's coming will get rid of—literally "burn up"—every unclean teletial thing, to get the earth ready for a terrestrial state during the millennium. So we repent and repent again, using the repentance process as the means to change and become sanctified or made pure. The spirit reveals, among other things, what we need to "work on." All men need to repent and make changes in their lives. That is why the scriptural promise is "and unto him that repenteth and sanctifieth himself before the Lord shall be given eternal life." (D&C 133:62) It does *not* say unto the best and the brightest, those of the most noble heritage, the most gifted, shall be given eternal life. The promise is unto "him that repenteth." That puts us all on equal footing. No matter where we are now, the repentance process can change and improve us in accordance with the pattern of the Savior's life until we are "like him."

PREPARING BY UNDERSTANDING THE JUDGMENT TO COME

The Day of the Lord is a *great* and *terrible* day. The brightness of his glory will either be wonderful for the saints who have prayed through the ages: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20) or it will "burn as an oven" to the unrighteous. "For the hour is nigh and the day soon at hand when the earth is ripe; and all the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble; and I will burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that wickedness shall not be upon the earth." (D&C 29:9) Thus the necessity of humility and cleanliness from sin. How much better to be cleansed of your sins through the personal crucible of repentance, a voluntary process, than to be burned up at his coming in the "oven" of his wrath. Joseph Smith prayed at the dedication of the Kirtland temple, that the saints "may be prepared against the day of burning." (D&C 109:46) To be prepared for that we do not need spurts of religiosity but a life of steady, prayerful covenant keeping, repenting and obeying with a willing spirit. These are the characteristics of an LDS woman who has a heart for God and will be looking forward with joyful anticipation for the glorious day of his return to earth.