



Perfect *Brightness* of Hope

By Elder Jeffery R. Holland

Looking Ahead

Last October, President Russell M. Nelson invited us to look ahead to this April 2020 conference by each of us in our own way looking back to see the majesty of God's hand in restoring the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sister Holland and I took that prophetic invitation seriously. We imagined ourselves living in the early 1800s, looking at the religious beliefs of that day. In that imagined

setting, we asked ourselves, "What's missing here? What do we wish we had? What do we hope God will provide in response to our spiritual longing?"

Well, for one thing, we realized that two centuries ago we would have dearly hoped for the restoration of a truer concept of God than most in that day had, hidden as He often seemed to be behind centuries of error and

misunderstanding. To borrow a phrase from William Ellery Channing, a prominent religious figure of the day, we would have looked for the “parental character of God,” which Channing considered “the first great doctrine of Christianity.” Such a doctrine would have recognized Deity as a caring Father in Heaven, rather than a harsh judge dispensing stern justice or as an absentee landlord who had once been engaged in earthly matters but was now preoccupied somewhere else in the universe.

Yes, our hopes in 1820 would have been to find God speaking and guiding as openly in the present as He did in the past, a true Father, in the most loving sense of that word. He certainly would not have been a cold, arbitrary autocrat who predestined a select few for salvation and then consigned the rest of the human family to damnation. That love would be His ultimate reason for sending Jesus Christ, His Only Begotten Son, to the earth.

Moving Forward

Speaking of Jesus, had we lived in those first years of the 19th century, we would have realized with great alarm that doubts about the reality of the Savior’s life and Resurrection were beginning to take significant hold within Christendom. Therefore, we would have hoped for evidence to come to the whole world that would confirm the biblical witness that Jesus is the Christ, the literal Son of God, Alpha and Omega, and the only Savior this world will ever know. It would have been among our dearest hopes that other scriptural evidence be brought forward, something that could constitute another testament of Jesus Christ, enlarging and enhancing our knowledge of His miraculous birth, wondrous ministry, atoning sacrifice, and glorious Resurrection. Truly such a document

would be “righteousness [sent] down out of heaven; and truth [sent] forth out of the earth.”

Observing the Christian world in that day, we would have hoped to find someone authorized by God with true

priesthood authority who could baptize us, bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost, and administer all gospel ordinances necessary for exaltation. In 1820, we would have hoped to see fulfilled the eloquent promises of Isaiah, Micah, and other ancient prophets regarding the return of the majestic house of the Lord. We would have thrilled to see the glory of holy temples established again, with the Spirit, the ordinances, the power, and the authority to teach eternal truths, heal personal wounds, and bind families together forever. I would have looked anywhere and everywhere to find someone authorized to say to me and my beloved Patricia that our marriage in such a setting was sealed for time and all eternity, never to hear or have imposed on us the haunting curse “until death do you part.” I know that “in [our] Father’s house are many mansions,” but, speaking personally, if I were to be so fortunate as to inherit one of them, it could be no more to me than a decaying shack if Pat and our children were not with me to share that inheritance.

Well, our 1820 list of hopes could go on, but perhaps the most important message of the

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Restoration is that such hopes would not have been in vain. Beginning in the Sacred Grove and continuing to this day, these desires began to be clothed in reality and became, as the Apostle Paul and others taught, true anchors to the soul, sure and steadfast. What was once only hoped for has now become history.

The Goodness of God

Thus our look back at 200 years of God’s goodness to the world. But what of our look ahead? We still have hopes that have not yet been fulfilled. Even as we speak, we are waging an “all hands on deck” war with COVID-19, a solemn reminder that a virus 1,000 times smaller than a grain of sand can bring entire populations and global economies to their knees. When we have conquered this—and we will—may we be equally committed to freeing the world from the virus of hunger, freeing neighborhoods and nations from the virus of poverty. May we hope for schools where students are taught—not terrified they will be shot—and for the gift of personal dignity for every child of God, unmarred by any form of racial, ethnic, or religious prejudice. Undergirding all of this is our relentless hope for greater devotion to the two greatest of all commandments: to love God by keeping His counsel and to love our neighbors by showing kindness and compassion, patience and forgiveness. These two divine directives are still—and forever will be—the only real hope we have for giving our children a better world than the one they now know.

In addition to having these global desires, many in this audience today have deeply personal hopes: hope for a marriage to improve, or sometimes just hope for a

marriage; hope for an addiction to be conquered; hope for a wayward child to come back; hope for physical and emotional pain of a hundred kinds to cease. Because the Restoration reaffirmed the foundational truth that God does work in this world, we can hope, we should hope, even when facing the most insurmountable odds. So, I ask, “If so many of our 1820 hopes could begin to be fulfilled with a flash of divine light to a mere boy kneeling in a patch of trees in upstate New York, why should we not hope that righteous desires and Christlike yearnings can still be marvelously, miraculously answered by the God of all hope?” We all need to believe that what we desire in righteousness can someday, someday, somehow yet be ours.

Brothers and sisters, we know what some of the religious deficiencies in the early 19th century were.

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