

## *What Time Is This?*

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland and Patricia T. Holland

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**Sister Holland:** Elder Holland and I are very honored to be invited to speak to you this afternoon. We were fortunate enough to be at BYU when the idea of a women's conference was born, so being with you today is a little trip down memory lane for us.

**Elder Holland:** We commend the conference committee on its theme, "For Such a Time as This." We are so grateful for Sister Wendy Watson Nelson's introduction of that theme and have noted how many other wonderful applications and developments of that scriptural message have appeared throughout the conference program.

**Sister Holland:** We have posed the title of our remarks as a question, "What Time Is This?" Obviously that scriptural story of Esther marks the convergence of an important woman with an important moment, an important "time." We want to take the next few minutes emphasizing what *our* time, what *this* time is, and how we, the women of the Church, can seize it, Esther-like, to turn it to advantage.

**Elder Holland:** First of all, may I say this is a time to be grateful and optimistic. Ours is the most blessed, the most abundant and glorious time in the history of the world. We really do mean "fulness" when we speak of the dispensation of the fulness of times. We have more blessings spread among more people in more parts of the world than ever before in the story of the human family. You have all noted that President Hinckley is always so positive and upbeat. He is unfailingly optimistic. Just at this last general conference time he said in one of our meetings, "Things are just going to get better and better and better." I love that spirit.

**Sister Holland:** And, of course, as Latter-day Saints, the way we can make things "better and better" for everyone is to share our love and share the principles, covenants, and promises of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To have had the gospel restored in *our* time, for

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*our* benefit and that of our children and our grandchildren, is the greatest of all the blessings of “our time.” We have so much to share.

**Elder Holland:** I have often told young people that for the privilege of living in such a time they (we) have a responsibility that has never come in exactly this way to any other dispensation of Church members. *We* are the people in the eternal scheme of things who must prepare the Church of the Lamb for the arrival of the Lamb. No earlier people in ancient days ever had that assignment. What a tremendous responsibility! This means that before this is over we have to look like His Church members would look and act like His Church members would act. This will require all of us to move closer and closer to the heart of the gospel, to true principles of discipleship and faith, qualities of the heart and spirit. In short it means we have to live and be, to actually demonstrate, what it is we are always so quick to say we “know” in our testimony meetings. Eventually that has to mean not so much of programs or external schedules and certainly not so much of temporal things or the distractions the world puts before us. As a people we must increasingly strive for *inner* qualities, striving for *profound faith* and *deep spirituality*, striving to live as disciples of Christ would live. That is the task for us *and* for our families in this time of “dispensational hastening.”

**Sister Holland:** Sisters, we especially want you to hear today our great desire to pass the blessings of the gospel—and especially the *love* of the gospel—on to the next generation—our children and grandchildren and yours. In that spirit may I share a very personal story with you. My great-grandmother on my mother’s side of the family came from the Bern-Interlaken area of Switzerland. You may have visited there, or at least seen the travel posters! Surely it is among the most beautiful locations on the face of the earth—green and majestic nature at its loveliest.

After joining the Church and emigrating to join the Saints moving west, those great-grandparents were called to settle the little community of Enterprise in southern Utah. Perhaps you have been to Enterprise, too, but I *know* you have *not* seen any travel posters of it! I do love the community of my birth and childhood memories, but it is not Switzerland! It was hot in the summer and cold in the winter, the wind blew constantly, and it was barren! What a test of faith it must have been for these Swiss ancestors to be called to such an area so totally opposite to that green land of lakes and alpine beauty they had left behind.

My great-grandmother decided she would do something about it. With her two hands and a shovel, she harvested some small pine tree seedlings from the mountains not far away and planted them around the small church building that had just been erected. Then every day she would carry two buckets of water from her home nearly three blocks away, one bucket in each hand, to water those trees and keep them growing. It was arduous work for a little woman bent over with osteoporosis, but she made every drop count in a daily ritual that over time gave each tree a regular, if meager, drink of moisture.

**Elder Holland:** In this exercise Pat’s great-grandmother often took her little 10-year-old granddaughter with her, telling stories and reminiscing about her life in Switzerland as

she carried her two precious buckets of water. One day one of the brethren of the community stopped her and said, with something of a dismissive tone, “Oh, Sister Barlocker, why do you make this useless journey each day to water those scrubby little pine trees? They will never survive in this harsh climate and difficult soil, and even if they did, they will never grow to any size in your lifetime. Why don’t you just give up and forget your high Swiss hopes in this matter?”

Well, little Sister Barlocker rose to the full 4 feet 8 inches of her stature, looked this good brother in the eye and said, “I know these trees will not grow very large in my lifetime. But if I stay with it, they *will* live and they will grow. And although I will not enjoy their beauty and their shade, this little girl will. I am doing this for her.”

**Sister Holland:** That 10-year-old grandchild was my mother. And my mother with all of her siblings, and cousins, and everyone else in Enterprise did live to see those trees reach an impressive height and to give off lovely, much needed shade from the desert sun. Then I grew up enjoying those trees, playing under their branches, and seeing them frame the church which I attended as a young woman. And now I have lived to see not only my children but also my grandchildren play, have picnics, laugh, and hold 24th of July relay races all through and in and around those beautiful trees, which now literally tower over the community—and over the pioneer heritage—of little windblown, once-barren Enterprise, Utah.

In this homely little story my great-grandmother taught me several wonderful lessons. First, speaking of a time for gratitude, I am so grateful that she did something for her posterity that was hard and demanding, but which she knew would bless their lives and bring them happiness. And of course that wasn’t just by planting lovely trees. She taught her children and her grandchildren the gospel, lived it every day of her life, and brought pure, uncompromised righteousness to us in a way that none of her posterity could ever deny. In that sense she nourished us even more faithfully than she nourished those trees!

Sisters, I pray we will all live with this sense of linked generations. In a very real way my grandmother did what she did for me, and that helps me want to do what I do for my children and grandchildren, for generations yet to come, so that they will be blessed in the gospel and have privileges in their lives that I may not see but which they will.

Thinking about all of this, including my husband’s comments about preparing the Church of the Lamb for the return of the Lamb, has given me a new insight into the scripture in the 52nd section of the Doctrine and Covenants that says, “For thus saith the Lord, I will cut my work short in righteousness” (D&C 52:11). I have always thought that meant that the Lord wouldn’t let wickedness go on too long, that He would “cut the last days short” rather than allow too much damage done. I am sure it does mean something of that, but lately I have wondered if it didn’t also mean that the work can be cut short—or finished—only if there is a clear demonstration of righteousness among the Saints, only if we are looking and acting not only like the *Church* of the Lamb but looking and acting like the *Lamb* Himself! Maybe it is a little like the change that comes when hot water turns to steam. We can sort of move along as reasonably warm water people, but until we

push it to that magic 100 degrees Centigrade we don't get the miracle of change that a burst of steam offers. Maybe this is just my own interpretation of this scripture about "cut[ting the] work short in righteousness," but if a little more righteousness can cut these last days a little shorter and bring the Savior's return a little sooner, I am all for it!

**Elder Holland:** One of the great truths Pat expressed in that wonderful little story of her great-grandmother is that in bringing forward this day of righteousness, a day that will make the members of the Church what we ought to be, requires us to *focus on the children*.

We don't know when the Lord will "cut short" His work, but we know that the coming generations—our children and grandchildren, collectively speaking—move progressively toward it, whenever it is, and they must be as prepared for that day as we are trying to be—or even more so.

**Sister Holland:** I have always loved this verse from Alma, who said to *his* children: "And now, . . . this [is] the ministry unto which ye were called, to declare these glad tidings unto this people, to prepare *their minds*; . . . that they may *prepare the minds of their children* to hear the word at the time of his coming" (Alma 39:16; emphasis added). And may I say you are doing a *wonderful* job of that. As we travel around the Church we see magnificent children and youth—Primary children who carry their scriptures to Church and teenagers who can't wait to go on missions and marry in the temple. The Lord loves you for what you are doing in preparing the minds *and* the hearts of His children. And we love you too!

**Elder Holland:** Dear sisters, our beloved associates in this work, in "such a time as this" may I plead with you never to underestimate or undervalue your divine role both as personal, powerful contributors to the kingdom of God and as the nurturers and benefactors of His "little ones," who will yet have such a divine impact on the unfolding of this work. I fear that virtually nothing—or at least not much—that the world says to you acknowledges your divine role as women. I am reminded that throughout the creation sequence of Genesis God viewed His work, including the creation of man, and called it "good." But for the one and only time in that creation story He then said something was "*not good*." He said it was *not good* that man should be alone. In short the Creation, even with Adam, was incomplete. Here I invoke President Gordon B. Hinckley's language: "As His final creation, the *crowning of His glorious work*, He created woman. I *like to regard Eve as His masterpiece* after all that had gone before, the final [great] work before He rested from His labors."<sup>1</sup> I join my testimony to President Hinckley's in that assessment. Surely it must have been at this point, with so much that was "good" having been done and having remedied the one thing that was "*not good*," He could say after Eve's arrival it was all "*very good*."

In this great eternal work women have carried the torch of faith and family from the beginning. The need for that torch to burn brightly and dispel the darkness has never been greater than "in this time." Little wonder that the Prophet Joseph said, "If you live up to your privileges, the angels cannot be restrained from being your associates."<sup>2</sup> The

scriptures speak of women being “elect.” What a powerful doctrinal and covenantal term! And who “elects” you? You do!—and so does God Himself, who has all the joy and delight of a father in you as His daughter, you who pass on light and hope, pass on life itself and a glorious gospel legacy until the work is finished.

**Sister Holland:** In all of this, we do not want you to feel overwhelmed. If the work of true righteousness yet before us seems monumental, remember that we have monumental help. We, as women, have too often thought we are “little” people with little influence, but the Lord keeps pleading with us not to think that way, not when we are *His* divine daughters on *His* errand. After all, “the errand of angels is given to women; and this is a gift that, as sisters, we claim.”<sup>3</sup> And as the Lord said, “Wherefore, as ye are agents, ye are on the Lord’s errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord’s business” (D&C 64:29).

Women have the commission to create, to bring to fruition and provide development of the divinity within the children of God. With that commission comes a divine spiritual capacity that (to me) is unfathomable to our human view. Some of the words that come to my mind regarding a woman’s discipleship are life, love, energy, holiness, intelligence, strength, change.

**Elder Holland:** Sisters, we all need to believe in ourselves as God’s “agents” much, much more than we do, activating the gifts and the powers He has given us *as if He Himself were here*. On the outside we may seem to be “little people,” little everyday souls with everyday problems, but we are the everyday instruments God has always used to do His work and perform His miracles from the beginning. This is that power of the Atonement to which we pay much too little attention—not only did Christ save us from our sins but He saved us from ourselves, our horrible warped opinions and negative views of ourselves. That is the miracle of being reborn and “spiritually begotten of [the Savior],” as King Benjamin said, of saying that we are “changed through faith on his name” (Mosiah 5:7). If we say we are “changed through faith on his name,” then let’s act like such a change has occurred.

**Sister Holland:** I want to add here that all of us need to remember we are more divine than we are temporal and only the adversary would have us believe otherwise. Remember we are truly spiritual beings having a short temporal experience. If we can remember that, we can more readily call upon those spiritual gifts that are ours and that have been made powerful in us through the Atonement of Christ. I read a poet recently who wrote of the “consuming fire of Christ,” a divine flame that would burn away our sins and shortcomings, our sorrows and inadequacies. That is something I want to pass on to the next generation—“the consuming fire of Christ”—a fire set by our own love.

In that spirit may I say that one of my great wishes for this women’s conference, is that it will be a time when we stop “beating up” on ourselves and let the grace of heaven—this divine flame if you will—wash over us and make us whole—truly “holy.” Remember, no matter what you have done, you can be forgiven of it, so get the process started by forgiving yourself and let repentance lead you on to the miracle of God’s forgiveness.

Take hope. Look up. Be good to yourself, because your Heavenly Father surely wants to be good to you. Let's let the Spirit envelope us, make us calm, and heal our souls.

**Elder Holland:** Knowing women as I do and as the presiding Church officer here today, I want to say to you, “No, everything you have done is *not* wrong. No, you are *not* a failure. No, you are not personally to blame for *every* mishap in the world since the ark landed.” We are all pretty hard on ourselves, but it seems to me women are harder on themselves than men will ever be. Why is that so? We ask you not to do it. Repent when or where that is necessary, but then honor that other “R”—*Rejoice!* Make a resolve today that this is “your time” to be good to yourself. It will surprise you how much that helps you be good to all the others whom you want so much to bless in your life.

**Sister Holland:** Sisters, may I make an appeal that it is a time for us, especially as women, to try to strip ourselves of something else that also seems so prevalent among women. I suppose men suffer with such things, too, but it seems to be particularly evident, and particularly painful, among women. It is closely related to the things my husband just touched on. I speak of the constant feeling we seem to have that what we are or what we have is not enough. That is Satan's demonic chant sounding continually in our ears. It is not true! We are more intelligent than this. We are stronger, much stronger, than this! Constantly comparing ourselves with others leaves us feeling so weak and worthless. It taps into our pride and poisons with jealousy. Let's start a new “chant”—that we are women of Christ, that we are spiritually strong personally, and that we will prepare the next generation for their opportunities. Let us strip ourselves of pride and vanity and envy forever.

Listen to this counsel given in ancient days. It is *very* direct concerning what we, as sisters in this Church, ought to address. Alma asks: “Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. . . .

“Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared; and I would that he [and she!] should prepare quickly, for the hour is close at hand, and [she] knoweth not when the time shall come” (Alma 5:28–29).

May I stress, sisters, that this *stripping* ourselves of envy and pride is a poignant, almost painful description of what we must be willing to do. Furthermore, when we have undergone such a potentially painful “stripping” of an adverse trait, we must then help our daughters and granddaughters and the young women who come under our influence (and the men!) do the same. Heaven only knows how much the world uses envy and pride and worldly glamour in our society. We have to walk away from these things but this will not be easy to do. We will need these gifts of heaven of which we spoke earlier, the power of God's grace and priesthood, the atoning power of the Savior, which compensates where we try and try but seem to fall short.

James knew all this. He said: “The spirit which God implanted in us [all of us] turns towards envious desires. *Yet the grace he gives is stronger.* Thus the scripture says, *God opposes the arrogant and gives grace to the humble.* Be submissive then to God. . . .

*Come close to [him] and he will come close to you. . . . Humble yourselves before God and he will lift you up*” (James 4:5–6, 8, 10, New English Bible; emphasis added).

Isn't that a tremendous thought? If we would not “lift” ourselves up with these cursed temptations of envy and pride, God would gladly step in and do the “lifting” for us! Only He can lift us up where He wants us and where we really want to be. We can't get there by clawing or clamor, by cattiness or cutting others down. We certainly can't get there by vaunting ourselves “up.”

Furthermore I believe with all my heart that this is a challenge we will face again and again. We should not be discouraged if the challenge returns tomorrow just when we thought we gave it such a good effort today. I say this out of the honesty, and experience, of my own heart. I struggle with these issues just as you do, and just as everyone does. So don't give up hope and don't think you are the only one who feels these things or struggles with these temptations. We all do, but every effort is a godly one, and every victory is counted for our good. And if we turn around to face the same challenge again tomorrow, so be it. We will work again, with all our heart, to strip away anything that keeps us from truly being “meek and lowly”—in all the right ways—before God. His grace *is* sufficient to help us succeed at that.

My dear sisters and friends, collectively speaking I think about you all the time. I love you. I know most of you have experienced some heartache and disappointment as well as joy and hopefulness. We have wanted our words to be encouraging to you and that you would hear in them our love for you. I truly believe that “cut[ting the] work short in righteousness” requires the element of love to prevail in our lives. Love of God, love of each other, and, yes, love of ourselves. The two great commandments are still the two great commandments. These will be the ultimate marks of our discipleship. The sooner we can come to that love, the sooner we are truly Christ's people and (to my mind) the sooner He can come. If we can do this, live with true, expansive charity and unbounded love, perhaps our children will then see our example and recognize that we, their mothers and grandmothers, their aunts and sisters, their teachers and the wonderful women in this Church, are disciples of the Savior of the world—because we have “love one to another” (John 13:34–35). My earnest prayer is that we can receive His image in our countenance and sing “the song of redeeming love” (Alma 5:26) forever in this, His true and redeeming Church.

**Elder Holland:** Sisters, Pat has testified of *our* need to increase love in our discipleship. Let my testimony be the other half of hers, to testify how much *the Father* and *the Son* personify love and shower it upon our sometimes meager efforts to do the same. I believe if you could grasp in some small way the vision of Their majestic love for you, it would free you to love Them and everyone else within your circle of influence in profound and powerful new ways. One of the most important verses I know of in all of scripture is the supplication Jesus gave in the great intercessory prayer prior to His suffering in Gethsemane and crucifixion on Golgotha. In that prayer, which President David O. McKay once called the greatest prayer ever uttered, the Savior said, “And this is life eternal, that they [that is, we] might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom

thou has sent” (John 17:3; emphasis added). I stress that phrase, “*the only true God.*”

May I declare to you and all others who will hear me that one of the tragedies of our day is that the true God is not known. Tragically, contemporary Christianity has inherited the view of a capricious, imperious, and especially angry God whose primary duty is to frighten little children and add suffering to the lives of already staggering adults. May I unequivocally and unilaterally cry out against that sacrilegious and demeaning view of a loving and compassionate Father in Heaven. I wonder if the Savior may not have known, even in His mortal years, that this would happen, thus His plea for the world to know *the true God*, the fatherly God, the forgiving and redeeming and benevolent God. To bring that understanding was *one* of the reasons Christ came to the earth.

So feeding the hungry, healing the sick, rebuking cruelty, pleading for faith—and hope and charity—this was Christ showing us the way of the Father, He who is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, long-suffering and full of goodness”<sup>4</sup> In His life and especially in His death, Christ was declaring, “This is *God’s* compassion I am showing you, as well as my own.” It is the perfect Son’s manifestation of the perfect Father’s care. In Their mutual suffering and shared sorrow for the sins and heartaches of the rest of us, we see ultimate meaning in the declaration: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:16–17).

I bear personal witness this day of a living, loving God, who knows our names, hears and answers prayers, and cherishes us eternally as His children. I testify that there is no spiteful or malicious motive in Him. I testify that all He does (He who never sleeps nor slumbers) is seek for ways to bless us, to help us, and to save us. I pray that you will believe that and embrace it. I pray that you will strive to see the wonder and majesty of heaven’s concern and compassion for us.

I testify that Joseph Smith’s vision of the Father and the Son began a chain of events that would change—and save—the world if the world would but accept the divine beings that he saw. I testify that President Gordon B. Hinckley is a true prophet of that loving God in every sense of the word, and so will his successors be until the Savior comes to rule and reign.

In the spirit of this testimony may I conclude this conference with a blessing upon each one of you, which is my Apostolic privilege to bestow. Having been assigned here by the First Presidency of the Church I bring their blessing with it. Sisters, I bless you in “such a time as this” that you will leave this conference more grateful, more peaceful, more certain of God’s love and more secure in your standing before Him than ever before. I bless you that with His unfailing companionship you will find your way through your most difficult days and receive answers to your earnest prayers. I especially bless you if you are troubled about someone else—about your spouse, or your desire for a spouse, or your children, or your parents, or your friends. I bless you to know that God loves and honors the earnest pleadings you make and that He is pleased to rush to your aid, to assist

in the problem at hand, and to heal not only your heart but the heart of those about whom you worry and for whom you pray and sometimes weep.

I bless you to know that there are good days ahead, always, that the darkest clouds always part and the most fearful days always flee before the beneficent face of the Father, the redeeming grace of the Son, and the sweet influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives. In our time and in such a gospel as heaven has bestowed upon us, we have every reason to be happy and every cause to be filled with divine anticipation. May you trust forever in the God who gave you life and in His Beloved Son, whose Church this is and who paid the ultimate price to redeem your life and restore your soul.

### Notes

1. *Ensign*, November 1991, 97; emphasis added.
2. *History of the Church*, 4:605.
3. “As Sisters in Zion,” *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 309.
4. *Lectures on Faith*, 42.