

Insights on Church Leadership

Marcus H. Martins, Ph.D.
Brigham Young University - Hawaii

Copyright © 1993, 1999, 2001 (web edition)
by Marcus H. Martins
All Rights Reserved

This text may be printed or copied for incidental home or Church use
This is not an official publication of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Chapter 3

Hope of Better Days

Both Paul and Mormon taught that there are three main virtues to be acquired in mortality: faith, hope, and charity¹. But Mormon went one step further and asked: "what is it that ye shall hope for?"² His answer was that we should have hope of achieving eternal life through the atonement of Christ. We usually tend to center our hopes in more "down-to-earth" types of objectives because throughout our mortal journeys we face temptations, trials, tragedies, and all sorts of problems and unpleasant experiences.

Sometimes when we are suffering we seem to forget that we are not the only ones in that predicament. But perhaps the most serious consequence of forgetting this idea is that we also forget that the Lord will allow us to pass through sorrow for a wise purpose. In his words to the Prophet Joseph Smith, "... know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience and shall be for thy good."³

Unfortunately, it is hard to keep these words in mind when we are in profound pain. When we can't even sleep well at night because of economic setbacks, extreme poverty, or a chronic illness, we tend to focus our hope solely in being delivered from the source of our pain. In moments of such extreme suffering we may even momentarily forget our purpose on this earth and our eternal possibilities. Sadly, some people start to believe in the false notion that the Lord cannot save them from their temporal problems, and they then try to find solutions by taking shortcuts. Many good persons have been lost in this process⁴. Now I invite you to let your mind wander together with mine for a few minutes while we consider this issue.

A Time of Profound Changes

We live in a very unique time. Miracles are happening everywhere, everyday. Computers, instant communication via satellite, transplants, genetically-engineered medicines, things we did not even dream about 20 years ago are now part of the daily lives of many of us, and they indirectly benefit the lives of many

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:13; Moroni 7:1

² Moroni 7:41

³ D&C 121:7. Notice that the Lord did not say that those things would "serve" as an experience, but rather that they would "give" experience. That being the case, it seems that no one is exempted from having problems. Sorry for the bad news ... but to compensate that, read 2 Corinthians 4:15 and D&C 58:4.

⁴ 1 Nephi 8:28,32

others, even those who do not possess some of these resources readily available. Blessings beyond our present dreams will be part of the daily lives of many more of us 20 years from now.

The restored religion has also experienced a fast development, although not in such a visibly widespread manner. When I was a recent convert in the Church of Jesus Christ, one week after my baptism, I didn't know or understand much about the gospel, and kept wondering if one day I would understand. Today, after all I have experienced and done in the Church, I still don't know or understand much, but now I have a testimony that one day I will understand everything--and that's definitely a progress⁵.

Today we live in a moment of profound changes. Throughout the world societies are changing--slowly abandoning old prejudices and condemning old unfair practices. All this is part of the preparations for the establishment of Christ's millennial kingdom. It is true that the greater part will be performed at or soon after the time of his return, but the presence of some minimal requisites is necessary, and one of these requisites is the existence of a people "minimally" prepared to live in a new type of society.

Yet, in today's society, money and smartness are still two of the fundamental requisites to success--meaning a mixture of power, influence and wealth. There are all kinds of wicked shortcuts to achieve these requisites: corruption, crime, fraud, flattery, etc.

In the future, the priesthood and the pure knowledge from God will be the fundamental requisites, and there are no shortcuts to obtain them. Anyone who wishes them must first enter the strait gate of repentance and baptism and receive the sacred ordinances of the House of the Lord. He or she must also learn to use the power of the Holy Ghost to comprehend the mind of the Lord, thus obtaining knowledge--and it is impossible to do this without righteousness, for the Spirit of the Lord does not dwell in unholy temples⁶.

There is no way to get these requisites through fraud, because the priesthood cannot be used--it does not work--under hypocrisy or guile⁷. It is also impossible to flatter the Lord; he is indeed pleased with our adoration, but to the flatterers he reserves the unpleasant surprise of hearing from his lips the terrible words: "... Ye never knew me; depart from me ye that work iniquity."⁸

The Temporary Nature of the Mortal Environment

Sometimes we get so involved in the things of this life that we forget to look upward and consider the things pertaining to the eternity. This is a finite space in which we are temporarily placed to have certain types of experiences. This is not our place; this is not our home. In a certain sense we do not own anything here; all we have is a "temporary ownership", or rather, "stewardship" of the basic materials that have always belonged to the Lord.

The piece of land in the American continent where my home is located--that official documents from the Brazilian government prove to be mine--is not really mine. It is possible that about 2000 years ago

⁵ D&C 121:26,28-32; 130:8-11

⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:16; Mosiah 2:37

⁷ D&C 121:42

⁸ Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 7:33; from now on, "JST". Notice the difference between this translation and the one found in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. Christ knows all things; therefore, it is unlikely that he would have said "I never knew you" (KJV Matthew 7:23). It is precisely because he knows these individuals that he is going to reject them. Their rejection is based on the fact that *they* did not know Christ. This agrees with what the Lord later said in prayer: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3)

a Nephite lawyer might have claimed that very piece of land as his, and he also might have had an official document proving his ownership. And what if about 3000 years ago a noble Jaredite had that same piece of land as part of his domains? He also might have had a document proving his ownership of that land--or he might have used his sword to convince others of the truthfulness of his claim. We still don't know completely what happened before the flood, about 5000 years ago, but a civilization might have flourished in that same area of this continent for about 2000 years. If I were to speculate, I would say that there might be lots of people claiming rights over that same piece of land, and all I know is that I was the last one to arrive.

All these titles, rights and concessions are temporary, finite. They only serve for the short period we spend in this world⁹. Is it worthwhile to work for these titles, rights and concessions? I think so; but not at any cost. It is not worthwhile to compromise that which is eternal for that which is temporary. The world teaches that in this life "anything goes," but this is the attitude of those who seek shortcuts, and there are no shortcuts on the road that leads to the presence of the Lord.

Greater Changes Yet to Come

Today most of us may be considered "the weak things of the world," but the day is quite near when the priesthood of God will be the governing influence in the world, because Christ's millennial kingdom will be based on the authority of the priesthood. When that time arrives all books will be opened, and nothing will be hidden. What then? All our "hidden" acts will be clearly exposed, either to our glory or to our shame.

I strongly believe that we are approaching the time in which we will all see opportunities be opened before us that will exceed our most sublime dreams. I don't believe it to be worthwhile to forgo these future opportunities in exchange for a handful of coins. One day our lives will be researched by our descendants, because they will certainly want to know what kind of people we were in this corrupt age. One of the qualities they will surely praise will be our patience in waiting for the Lord.

Today, some people bash the ancient Israelites who lost great blessings just because they could not wait for Moses to get down from Mount Sinai. Their reasoning at that time was probably like this: "My goodness! Moses has already been up there for more than a month. Nobody can let all this people waiting nobody-knows-what for over a month! A true leader must act quickly, and Moses still hasn't said what's in his mind. Maybe it is time to go back to Egypt..." Sometimes we act in this same manner when the Lord retains, or rather, retards the bestowing of some of his best blessings for some time. But when we consider the mercies of the Lord towards us we see that Egypt (or the way of the world) is not a valid option.

Some people believe that miracles and other great manifestations of the Lord's power only happened in "biblical times," and that the ancient people lived in better or holier environments than ours. That is not true. We have also been called to live holy lives (without becoming fanatics), and we are entitled to inspirational experiences with the manifestations of our Heavenly Father's power. Those who believe that the lives of the ancient saints or of the early saints of this dispensation had some sort of "mystical" characteristic, will probably be surprised when they learn how 300 years from now their descendants will narrate their ancestors' lives in the late 20th century. Every moment in our life is already part of history, and part of some sacred scripture that will be published in the distant future. The good news is that if we don't like the way this future accounts of our lives are currently being written, we still can--thanks to the atonement of Christ--change them.

⁹

Time is going fast, and for some of us old age is coming, but this cannot be a reason for despair, since despair comes because of iniquity, not because of righteousness¹⁰. Our children need role models to be followed, and if these role models are not us, and if our personal role model is not the Lord, things will be all right for some time, but eventually they will be all wrong¹¹.

When we leave this stage of our eternal existence we will understand clearly that the Lord was extremely wise in laying things in this manner. Who knows whether some have little because they have the capacity to achieve much, and others have much because perhaps they don't have the capacity to endure the need? In this way the Lord has prepared the minimal conditions for the salvation of both groups, and the day will come when all of them will possess everything--forever¹².

The Two Alternatives

In the face of all this, what will we do? Trust the world or trust the Lord? Many have chosen to trust the world. In ancient times the people chose to trust in their buildings, or in their temples; but the prophet Jeremiah admonished that this was not a good alternative:

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.¹³"

At another occasion the ancient people of the covenant placed their trust in their institutions, thus trusting in their academic titles, in their military ability, and in their economic wealth; once more, Jeremiah cautioned against this practice:

"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches¹⁴"

The search for safety and comfort in material wealth is not new. We can find statements from several prophets on the subject. President Wilford Woodruff said:

"There is no man that has an understanding of the blessings that God has promised ... but what will desire that in preference to the fading enjoyments and empty honors of this world. You may surround any man or woman with all the wealth and glory that the imagination of man can grasp, and are they satisfied? No. There is still an aching void. On the other hand, show me a beggar upon the streets, who has got the Holy Ghost, whose mind is filled with that Spirit and power, and I will show you a person who has peace of mind, who possesses true riches, and those

¹⁰ Moroni 10:22

¹¹ 3 Nephi 27:11

¹² D&C 76:55; 84:34

¹³ Jeremiah 7:3-7

¹⁴ Jeremiah 9:23

enjoyments that no man can obtain from any other source. ... It is better for a people to be wise, to get righteousness, to be the friend of God, than to occupy any other position in life.¹⁵

On another thought on this same subject, President Brigham Young criticized the selfish search for riches:

"A man or a woman who places the wealth of this world and the things of time in the scales against the things of God and the wisdom of eternity, has no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no heart to understand. What are riches for? For blessings, to do good. Then let us dispense that which the Lord gives us to the best possible use for the building up of his kingdom, for the promotion of the truth on the earth, that we may see and enjoy the blessings of the Zion of God here upon this earth ... I look around among the world of mankind and see them grabbing, scrambling, contending, and every one seeking to aggrandize himself, and to accomplish his own individual purposes, passing the community by, walking upon the heads of his neighbors--all are seeking, planning, contriving in their wakeful hours, and when asleep dreaming, "How can I get the advantage of my neighbor? How can I spoil him, that I may ascend the ladder of fame?" That is entirely a mistaken idea ... the man who seeks honor and glory at the expense of his fellow-men is not worthy of the society of the intelligent.¹⁶

We should not put our hope in buildings or in mortal, finite institutions. Beautiful buildings, secular (or even spiritual) knowledge, personal assets, or healthy good-looking bodies by themselves will not exalt us. Sometimes some of us may be deceived by the idea that because we have beautiful buildings (or a better educational or economic condition) we are on the sure way to salvation. However, our salvation will come as result of a combination of our faith in Christ, repentance, ordinances, individual works of righteousness (a result of our knowledge, understanding, and practice of the Lord's laws,) coupled with the Lord's grace generated by the atonement. As Nephi, Hanani the Seer, and King Jehoshaphat, of Judah, said:

"For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.¹⁷

"For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him ...¹⁸

"... Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.¹⁹

Waiting Patiently for the Lord's Salvation

On a certain Sunday, many years ago, in Rio de Janeiro, the late Odmar Bergqvist, former Elders Quorum President of the Tijuca Ward, delivered a talk with a title consisting of one word repeated three

¹⁵ JD, Vol.2, p.199, February 25, 1855. A partial quotation is found in "Discourses of Wilford Woodruff", p.5-6.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, Vol.15, p.18-19, April 28, 1872. Also found in "Discourses of Brigham Young", p.306-307.

¹⁷ 2 Nephi 25:23

¹⁸ 2 Chronicles 16:9

¹⁹ 2 Chronicles 20:20

times: "Patience, patience, patience." Today I think his words were wise, and they are a key to days yet to come. The Lord said:

"Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. ... But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. ... Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. ... For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee."²⁰

We must trust the Almighty and center our hope in Him, because he is powerful to save, and as a loving and perfect Father he will protect us, although at times we may be prostrated by diseases or suffer accidents; he will grant us our daily bread, although at times we may receive this bread through the instrumentality of other mortal beings; he will answer our prayers, although at times we may have to wait a long time to receive a particular blessing. The Prophet Nahum, King David, and Job testified in this manner:

"The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."²¹

"The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust ..."²²

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him. He also shall be my salvation ..."²³

If we develop this type of trust and help those we are serving also develop it, we will have our hope centered in Christ and we will be able to endure all obstacles and evils of this life, and we will finally secure an eternal salvation in the kingdom of God. The Prophet Joseph Smith's words of counsel to the Church were:

"... a very large ship is benefitted very much by a very small helm in the time of a storm, by being kept workways with the wind and the waves. Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed."²⁴

²⁰ Isaiah 40:10,31; 41:10,13

²¹ Nahum 1:7

²² Psalms 18:2

²³ Job 13:15-16

²⁴ D&C 123:16-17

About the Author



Marcus Helvécio Tourinho de Assis Martins is a native of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in July, 1972. In August of 1978 he became the first black member to serve as a full-time missionary for the Church in the 20th century, serving in the Brazil São Paulo North Mission.

Since then, brother Martins served as bishop, counselor in branch presidencies, member of stake high councils, stake and ward executive secretary, high priests group leader, ward mission leader, temple officiator, stake and ward sunday school president, and teacher in primary, sunday school, and institute of religion. In the early 1980's he also translated the “Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ” into Portuguese.

Brother Martins has worked over the years as a systems analyst and independent consultant for the Brazilian government and a number of private corporations. He holds a Ph.D. in Sociology of Religion, Race and Ethnic Relations, a Master’s degree in Organizational Behavior, and a bachelor’s in Business Management. He taught religion and sociology classes at Brigham Young University, Ricks College, and currently serves as chair of the department of religious education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii.

He and Sister Mirian Barbosa Martins, herself a native of Petrópolis, Brazil, and a returned missionary with several years of leadership experience, have four children: Flávio, Natália, Felipe, and Cristina.