

“Is It Worth It?”

M. RUSSELL BALLARD

My brothers and sisters, I am honored to be here tonight. I would seek an interest in your faith and prayers that what I say might be meaningful and might touch your hearts and cause you to want to be better tomorrow than you have ever been before. It is an awesome responsibility—I think that all of you can sense that—for anyone to take the time of this large audience of wonderful young Latter-day Saints. I assume this assignment with fear and trembling, seeking that the will of the Lord may be done.

I received the BYU football schedule with an invitation to attend the football games, but was disappointed to find that my travel schedule prevents me from attending any of the games this fall. Still, I thought I would share with you the Ballard family’s involvement in BYU athletics.

My father, who is in his eighty-third year, was assigned here during World War I as an Army officer. While he was in Provo and assigned to this campus, he felt that Brigham Young University should have a football team. He secured permission from the University officials to organize a team but was informed that no funds were available to buy uniforms or other necessary equipment.

My father, being the enterprising young man that he was—and still is—went about raising money through the communities of Utah County and was successful in raising enough money to buy the first uniforms for the first football team at BYU. He still takes great pleasure in talking about that involvement with this great University. I hope that we have a successful season this year—playing in better uniforms.

We have had an interesting experience in our family during the last few days. One of our married children and her husband decided to buy a home, and they spent a long time looking everywhere in the valley for a home that they could afford and that would meet their needs. I watched their search with interest. When they came to me for counsel and we went out and looked at the home that they had

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chosen, I had but one comment to my son-in-law. I would like to have that comment become my theme tonight. I asked him, "Is it worth it?"

How many times in life do you and I have to ask the question: "Is it worth it?" I suppose that many of you have purchased automobiles or stereo sets or televisions or something else that you felt was very important. I would guess that as you struggled with the question of whether or not to part with your hard-earned dollars you wrestled in your mind with the question, "Is it worth it?"

Every day we wrestle with this same question, my dear brothers and sisters. I understand that fifty percent of you are on this campus for the first time, beginning your college career at Brigham Young University. You will be in the throes of academic classwork beginning next week, and some of you are in for some surprises. Some of you are going to find that school at Brigham Young University is a little different from high school. You are going to find that the expectations are higher. You are probably going to find that the opportunities for learning are greater and wider and broader than you ever dreamed possible. I believe I can predict with safety that many times you will go back to your apartment with that question in you mind: "Is it worth it?"

What are your goals as you enter this great University? Will you pay the price for excellence? Are you willing to become the very best in the field you choose? Have you missionaries who are here from the Missionary Training Center made the commitment in your hearts and in your minds that you are going to be the very best missionaries that you are capable of being. Are some of you students or missionaries just walking through this experience—putting in the time, so to speak? Or have you gotten right down to the heart and core of the purpose of being a student here or being in training at the Missionary Training Center? I would hope that every one of us is wise enough to realize that we can be excellent, that

we can reach the top, that we can be the very best if we are willing to pay the price. We must be willing to establish in our minds this fact: In order to be great in whatever we attempt to do in life, we have to decide in advance that it is all worth it.

Have you set your priorities? Are they solidly and clearly defined in your minds? Were they clear when you got up this morning, And will they be clear tomorrow morning and each morning while you are on this campus? Each morning as you are serving in the mission field, is it clear in your mind what your first priority is? Are your priorities established clearly in relationship to the scriptures? What I would like to convey to you is that we are the sons and daughters of God. We have a great destiny, a great challenge, and a great work to do. Our number one priority could well be: Am I doing and living and acting each day as a candidate for the highest degree of glory in the celestial kingdom? If I asked you to raise your hand if you are interested in entering the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, I would be very surprised if every person's hand did not go up. I think that this is our ultimate long-range goal and our number one priority. I believe that as we think about this, and as we understand a few of the insights that the Lord has given us in the scriptures, we can easily come to the conclusion: Yes, it is worth it.

If you have brought your scriptures with you, you might like to join me in reading a few verses that demonstrate what I have just said. I invite you to turn to the seventy-sixth section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the fiftieth verse. I will read several verses of scriptures, skipping through the section in the interest of time; but I would encourage each of you to read these instructions carefully as you try to answer in your mind the question, "Is it worth it?" Beginning with verse fifty and fifty-one:

And again we bear record—for we saw and heard, and this is the testimony of the gospel of

Christ concerning them who shall come forth in the resurrection of the just—

They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandments which he has given.

I will pause here for just a moment. I would guess that most of you were baptized into the Church when you turned eight years of age. I was; and as I read that scripture and contemplate the kind of decision I made I conclude that I really did not make much of a decision on that day. My mother and father, to whom I am grateful, felt that I should be baptized. I can remember my interview with the bishop when I was eight, and I can remember the coaching from my mother before the interview. I remember her telling me, “Now, the bishop is going to ask you why you want to be baptized”—and I listened to her with great interest to hear what answer I should give the bishop. She also told me that I would be asked about receiving the Holy Ghost and being confirmed; she taught me why that was important. I went to my interview and passed it with flying colors for an eight-year-old; all of the questions were exactly as my mother had said they would be, and I gave all the right answers. But I really did not make much of a decision.

Many of you are converts to the Church and have had to ponder the question of whether or not you would be baptized—whether or not you would receive this sacred ordinance of the holy priesthood. But all of us, converts or not, have to deal with verse fifty-two every single day, if not every minute, of our lives. The Lord said: “That by keeping the commandments, they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power.”

“That by keeping the commandments . . .” We are faced at this moment with the question, “Is it worth it?” Is it worth keeping all of the commandments? Is it worth being morally clean? Is it worth living the Word of Wisdom? Is it worth being honest—honest in our business and in our dealings here on the campus in classes and tests? Is it worth paying tithes and fast offerings? Is it worth serving faithfully wherever we are called?

Each moment of each day we are faced with the decision-making based on the evaluation system that we have developed through training in our homes and the training of the Church. The guidelines are clear, and our vision should be riveted on the long-range goal of qualifying to inherit the highest degree of glory in the celestial kingdom.

I do not believe for a minute that simply wanting that great and glorious blessing will bring it to you, unless you are willing to repent where necessary and keep the commandments. I wish that somehow, by some gift, I could reach into your hearts and minds and build a sensitivity and love for the Lord. I would unite the force of that spirit within you with his spirit, so that you could rivet your eyes on that great goal and be willing to pay the price and keep the commandments.

Verse fifty-three: “And who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true.” Just a word about that: it is possible to fool your bishop, your mother and your father, your stake president—and even your mission president, your elders and sisters. But you cannot fool the Holy Ghost.

Oftentimes when we had a question-and-answer session in my mission, and invariably during such sessions in the missions that I have toured since becoming a General Authority, this question is asked: “Brother Ballard, what must we do to have our calling and election made sure?”

The answer seems relatively simple—perhaps too simple for some of us—but as I have studied that question I feel safe in answering it by saying, “Live your life in such a way that the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Ghost, can testify to the Father on your behalf that you have in very deed been just and true in keeping all of the commandments.” You and I cannot fool the Holy Ghost. It is not wisdom to try that. It is safety just to strive to keep the commandments every day by riveting our goal in our minds.

Is it worth the commitment that is necessary? Let me read to you verse fifty-five: “They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things.” I want to explain that because I am not sure that it has completely penetrated your mind yet, and it must in order for you to keep in focus the questions I am placing before you tonight: Is it worth it? This means those who keep all of the commandments, those who are just and true in the eyes of the Holy Ghost and on whose behalf the Holy Ghost can testify before the Father—“they are they into whose hands the Father has given all things.”

Ponder for a moment the meaning of the statement that all our Father has will be given you and me if we will keep all of the commandments. When I ponder that our Heavenly Father, through his great and glorious and exalted understanding and mastery of the holy priesthood, organized this world on which we live with the assistance of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ; when I contemplate that matter unorganized was organized into a world upon which you and I could dwell; when I contemplate that by the power of almighty God daylight was separated from darkness and the land from the sea, and the fishes were placed in the sea and the fowls in the air; when I contemplate the creation process—reread it in the book of Genesis—and realize that the Father promises to all his sons and daughters who are willing to pay the price of keeping all his commandments that he will give unto them *all* he has, I feel that it is indeed worth the price.

Verse fifty-eight describes further those who learn to be obedient, to master themselves, to set priorities, and not to lose sight of the long-range priority in the process of life: “Wherefore, as it is written, they are Gods, even the sons of God.” Oh, my brothers and sisters, if you could only contemplate and really understand, while you are here at this great University at your young age, what that means! And then, if you could just place that priority properly in your life and live up to it, you would never have any difficulty making the right decisions. You would always have tucked in the back of your mind this concept: “It is worth it. I am not going to compromise; I am not going to shortcut; I am going to go all the way, because it is worth it.”

Verse sixty-two: “These shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever.” Is that where you want to go? Is that where you want to be?

May I take a moment and share with you the feeling of Melvin J. Ballard, my grandfather and an apostle of the Lord? His recorded testimony is one of the great witnesses of this generation. He stood in the presence of the Savior of this world and was embraced by him and blessed by him, and he recorded in his testimony before the Quorum of the Twelve and the First Presidency in the temple on January 9, 1919, “Oh! if I could live worthy, though I would require four-score years, so that in the end when I have finished I could go into His presence and receive the feeling that I then had in His presence, I would give everything that I am and ever hope to be!” (Melvin R. Ballard, *Melvin J. Ballard . . . Crusader for Righteousness* [Salt Lake City; Bookcraft, 1966], p.66.) That is where we are talking about trying to go. We are trying to qualify for that blessing and that honor.

[Verse seventy:] *These are they whose bodies are celestial, whose glory is that of the sun, even the*

glory of God, the highest of all, whose glory the sun of the firmament is written of as being typical . . .

[Verse ninety-two:] *And thus we saw the glory of the celestial, which excels in all things—where God, even the Father, reigns upon his throne forever and ever. . . .*

[Then we have these powerful words in verses ninety-five and ninety-six—let them penetrate:] *And he makes them equal in power, and in might, and in dominion. And the glory of the celestial one, even as the glory of the sun is one.*

My brothers and sisters, that is a lofty goal and a great objective; but it is a promised objective, a real objective obtainable by you and me if we are willing to pay the price.

Could you turn quickly to the eighty-fourth section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the thirty-third through thirty-eighth verses? This, you young men all know, is the oath and covenant of the holy priesthood. There are some words here, though, that I would like you to hear to fortify what the Lord taught earlier in the seventy-sixth section.

For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken [listen carefully to the next few words because I think that this is the key], and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.

They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God.

And also all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord;

For he that receiveth my servants receiveth me;

And he that receiveth me receiveth my Father; And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father's kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him.

Is it worth it? Is it worth giving all the attention and all the energy that we can to the building

of this great Kingdom here upon the earth? I say yes, it is.

Now, you missionaries and returned missionaries, let me talk to you for a minute or two about one of the keys that I think is important in keeping the highest degree of the celestial kingdom foremost in our objectives. It will also help keep in our minds the thought, "It is worth it; I am not going to weaken; I am going to go forward; I am going to make it—because that's the promise of the Father to me, his child."

You and I must learn, as we walk through this life, how to become powerful spiritually. The spirit that dwells within this tabernacle of flesh and bone is the literal offspring of our eternal heavenly parents. We know that; we have all talked about it in Sunday School and priesthood meeting. Because of that spiritual side of our existence, we have a spark of divinity within us; for we trace our common parentage back to our heavenly parents, thus making us all brothers and sisters. We all understand that concept, I am sure. But our great struggle in life (and I must tell you that I have had my struggles and continue to have them, and I believe that everyone else does, too—I would be concerned for someone who did not) is to learn this principle of obedience and reliance upon the Lord. We must educate, feed, and build our academic side, or our temporal or physical side. The spirit has to be powerful and magnified in order to qualify for these great blessings. Section eighty-eight of the Doctrine and Covenants gives us helpful insight on the subject in verses fifteen through twenty-two:

And the spirit and the body are the soul of man. And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul.

And the redemption of the soul is through him that quickeneth all things, in whose bosom it is decreed that the poor and the meek of the earth shall inherit it.

Therefore, it must needs be sanctified from all unrighteousness, that it may be prepared for the celestial glory;

For after it hath filled the measure of its creation, it shall be crowned with glory, even with the presence of God the Father;

That bodies who are of the celestial kingdom may possess it forever and ever; for, for this intent was it made and created, and for this intent are they sanctified.

And they who are not sanctified through the law which I have given unto you, even the law of Christ [or the commandments], must inherit another kingdom, even that of a terrestrial kingdom, or that of a telestial kingdom.

For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory.

I do not know whether I can totally bring into focus what this means to me, but let me try.

I think that we should be trying to live the celestial law today. Is there any use in waiting until we are dead to try to live the celestial law? What difference should there be in the way we behave today and the way we will behave when the body and the spirit are separated—is there going to be a difference?

Grandfather Ballard taught with great power and I have enjoyed studying his sermons. I believe that he spoke with great insight as an apostle and a prophet. He said that when we die we will not even know that we are dead until we try to do something that requires a body and find that we cannot do it when the body and the spirit have been separated. Then, he said, would come our full realization of and great appreciation for the ministry and the atoning sacrifice of the Christ. Then we would all look forward in great anticipation to the day of resurrection, when the body and the spirit could be reunited once again, never to be parted.

If you have a bad habit, do you think death is going to change it? Do you think that habit will simply dissolve in some miraculous way

and will no longer be with you? I believe that the Lord impresses upon you and me the need to repent and live the law, keep the commandments, and keep our lives aligned to the celestial goal; because it is when we are here in mortality that the body and the spirit can learn together.

For example, when a man who smokes dies and his body is placed six feet into the ground, is there any reason for us to believe that when his body comes back up out of the ground it will no longer have the desires that it had when it was laid down? I do not think so. I think that the body will rise in the resurrection with the same desires and that the body and the spirit together must work out this matter of eternal salvation. This is why you and I must be believing enough and willing enough while we are here on this earth to strive with all our power to keep the commandments. “Is it worth it?” We need to ask ourselves; and I hope that I have made the point clear that it certainly is worth it.

To receive all that our Father has to give unto his sons and his daughters—by any reasonable standard of thinking, my brothers and sister, we would have to come away from this meeting tonight saying, “Yes, certainly it’s worth it.” “But,” you might say, “It’s hard, Brother Ballard. There are so many things out there that I have to conquer.” Heavenly Father knows that; he knows that it is difficult. But he is getting to know you and me. I used to tell my missionaries—and I will tell you great young men and women the same—that I do not think there will be a time in your life when the Lord will get better acquainted with you than he will on your mission. Do not tamper with mission rules; do not tamper with the commandments. Just do it because it is right, because that is what the handbook says, because that is what your mission president counsels you do to. Why? Because there is safety in it. They will not counsel you to do

anything that will not help exalt you and prepare you to become celestial.

The importance of such obedience comes home hard to me when President Benson telephoned with an assignment to speak at a funeral service for a missionary who had lost his life in the mission field. Do you have any feeling, brothers and sisters, for what it is like to speak at a service for a missionary who was serving well and lost his life on his mission—who was called home, in effect, to continue to another mission? I was impressed to tell that family that he had been transferred to a greater work, a higher work; but can you sense the feeling that goes through a General Authority's mind in that position? Oh, how grateful I was that I could call the mission president and ask him this brief question: What kind of an elder was he?

"Outstanding," the president said. "He could have been as assistant. He could have had any assignment in our mission. Brother Ballard, I just didn't have any finer missionary than this young man."

What a thrill it was to know that that missionary was living the celestial law on his mission. I am sure that he did not expect to be called home. I am sure that he did not expect that accident to occur. But it happened. He was alive and well in the morning and gone in the afternoon. Gone where? Back to the presence of our Father in Heaven.

Do you think that it was important that he was living the celestial law to the best of his ability? Will you ponder and determine as you walk through this experience at Brigham Young University or on your mission that you are going to live as close to that celestial law as you know how? Determine that you will strive to keep the commandments and strive to build the power of your spirit. Oh, that every one of us might have the power and the feeling of the great prophet Nephi! I love these words in the second chapter of 1 Nephi, the sixteenth verse:

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceeding young [I believe that he was younger than most of you], nevertheless being large in stature, and also having [the key words; listen:] great desires to know of the mysteries of God, . . .

Do you have that desire, a great desire to know of the mysteries of God? Do you desire it enough to pay the price? Nephi did.

Wherefore I did cry unto the Lord; [he said,] and behold he did visit me [When I read those words, chills run up and down my spine], and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.

Oh, the power there is in having a desire to know with all your heart the things of God! Do not permit your quest to become a doctor, lawyer, scientist, educator, salesman, or marketing executive overshadow your quest for a testimony of the divine mission of Jesus Christ, the divine mission of Joseph Smith, the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, and the knowledge that we are led by a prophet of God, even Spencer W. Kimball. Oh, that that assurance would burn in our hearts! Oh, that we would have the desire burning in our hearts, with all of the power we are capable of mustering, to know the mysteries of God! That the spirit might be educated and prepared for that great day of promise when we will go back into the presence of our Heavenly Father!

May I close my remarks, with a few great words from our prophet, and may I say to you that we desperately need every single one of you young people prepared—spiritually prepared and with all question out of your mind as to whether or not it is worth it. We need you fully resolved and solidly entrenched, certain that it is worth the goal, worth the quest, and worth the effort; because here is your job, and it is going to be a bigger job for you, I think, than it is for us. the job was given to you and

me by President Kimball last April as he closed that great general conference:

Now, my brothers and sisters, it seems clear to me—indeed this impression weighs upon me—that the Church is at a point in its growth and maturity when we are at last ready to move forward in a major way. But the basic decisions needed for us to move forward [listen carefully] as a people must be made by the individual members of the Church. . . .

We have paused on some plateaus long enough. Let us resume our journey forward and upward. Let us quietly put an end to our reluctance to reach out to others, whether in our own families, wards, or neighborhoods. We have been diverted at times from fundamentals on which we must now focus in order to move forward as a person and as a people.

[Spencer W. Kimball, “Let Us Move Forward and Upward,” *Ensign*, May 1979, p.82]

Oh, brothers and sisters, it is worth it! May God bless each one of you that in your individual lives you will find peace in your hearts and your minds. If there is transgression holding you back, seek out your bishop and get your

life righted to the celestial path, and then commit yourself to that course if you have not already done so. Commit tonight as you write your goals: “I am going to do my part. I am going to be ready when the brethren need me, whether it is to be a Sunday School teacher or president of the stake or a General Authority. I will be ready because it is worth it.”

I leave my witness and testimony that Jesus is the Christ. He lives; this is his church. How blessed we are to know that! We are on the road back into his holy presence. I testify that, if we will listen to the voice of the prophets and the apostles and strive to keep the commandments, all the blessings of eternity will in very fact become ours. May the Lord bless us to that end. May his peace be in your lives and in your activities on this campus this coming year. Have a great year, have a lot of fun, and in it all find yourself spiritually—find the real, deep roots of your own spirituality. May they be fed and nourished as never before, I pray humbly in the sacred and beloved name of Jesus Christ. Amen.