

# *Keep the Commandments— Beginning Right Now!*

M. RUSSELL BALLARD

**W**e call this a fireside. I'm not really sure what that means in the Church. But let me use my own interpretation tonight if I may. I would like to talk to you as I would talk to my own family—somewhat informally, but very earnestly. I would like to talk to you tonight about matters I think are of deep concern and I hope of deep interest to you in your lives as you prepare for the future.

## **Now Is the Time**

Let me begin by reminding you that being a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a very special privilege. Understanding the basic principles of the plan of salvation and the principles of life that we are to live by here upon the earth is a great blessing. Some of you may need to study the doctrines more diligently so you will know the full significance of the covenants and ordinances of the gospel plan and how it provides for us. Brothers and sisters, it's wonderful to know of God's plan to exalt his children. In mortality, separated from our Heavenly Father, we all walk by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must know his teachings and keep his commandments.

The missionary Amulek had some marvelous instructions on this subject. I read from the writings of Amulek as recorded in chapter 34 of Alma.

*Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.*

*For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.*

*And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.*

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*Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.*

Amulek continues,

*For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked.*

*And this I know, because the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell; yea, and he has also said that the righteous shall sit down in his kingdom, to go no more out; but their garments should be made white through the blood of the Lamb.*

[Alma 34:31–36].

Brothers and sisters, today, tomorrow, next week is the time for our preparation. In fact, it's a lifelong effort; it does not stop until we are safely dead with our testimony still burning very brightly. We ought to reverence life and cherish every minute of it. It should be so precious to us that we feel compelled to commit ourselves to making each day the very best day that we can, preparing ourselves someday to meet our Heavenly Father.

Not one of us here tonight knows how long he will be here upon the earth. Therefore, a wise man or a wise woman will constantly evaluate his or her life in light of the teachings of the gospel. We need to look deep into our own hearts and compare what we see in our lives today against what we have been taught about the glorious plan of salvation. Many may find that their lives are out of synchronization with the plan of salvation. If we see something in our lives that is not what it ought to be, then

we must have the courage to repent and make the necessary changes immediately.

Tonight, my beloved young people, will you think about your own life? Think about how you're doing right now in keeping the commandments of God. Do you see something in your life that is less than what you want it to be? Are you struggling with some habit or behavior that is not in harmony with the plan of salvation? Our Heavenly Father has such great confidence and trust in us that he has given us the freedom to make our own choices in life. Please listen to your conscience; it will help you make proper decisions if you will learn to follow its promptings.

Looking inward into one's own life takes a lot of courage. I know this because I have to look into my own. And sometimes we may see things in our lives that must be changed if we are going to enjoy the blessings of the gospel and prepare ourselves for eternal life.

If you know of things in your life that you do not like, ask your Heavenly Father for help and you will find the inner strength to change. Do not deceive yourselves, my beloved young people, and never suppose that you can deceive the Holy Ghost. We can deceive ourselves and others, but we cannot deceive the Holy Ghost. He is our spiritual teacher and knows our thoughts and the intents of our hearts.

Please do not attempt to accommodate your habits or behavior by making your own plan or by modifying or adjusting or tampering with God's plan. Sometimes we find young people who think that the gospel is too narrow. They think that the plan of salvation is too restrictive and come to believe that God will "understand" if they elect to "do their own thing." Please do not be lulled into that kind of thinking; rather, exercise faith and develop the courage to look inward, comparing your life to our Heavenly Father's plan. The world is full of many voices saying that God's plan of morality, honesty, and integrity is

old-fashioned and no longer required. You must never believe anything like this, but rather you need to know the doctrine and live by the teachings of the gospel.

The prophet Alma said:

*And now, my brethren, I wish from the inmost part of my heart, yea, with great anxiety even unto pain, that ye would hearken unto my words, and cast off your sins, and not procrastinate the day of your repentance;*

*But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering;*

*Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest.*

*And may the Lord grant unto you repentance, that ye may not bring down his wrath upon you, that ye may not be bound down by the chains of hell, that ye may not suffer the second death. [Alma 13:27–30]*

Tonight, brothers and sisters, find the courage to repent if necessary. By so doing you will cleanse your life and you will demonstrate unto your Father in Heaven your love for him.

Many people find that making commitments is difficult. However, in my opinion, you will find that you can make some commitments tonight just as easily as at any other time in your life. In fact, it might be easier tonight, as you look into your life, to make those commitments you need to make to improve your life. Righteous commitments that improve your life now will bring blessings both here in mortality and in the eternities to come.

### **Find Your Eternal Companion**

There shouldn't be a more righteous group of young students anywhere in the world than you who are beginning a new year here at BYU. The standards are high at this university, and they should be, for this is the university sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ. University training is preparation for life. The opportunities to meet fine friends of similar beliefs and standards are excellent here on this campus.

Now, may I speak about a principle of the plan that needs more of your careful attention. The principle is temple marriage. I worry about you handsome returned missionaries. (I emphasize *returned*) who maybe postponing or delaying marriage. Brethren, I do not believe you're thinking straight about this part of the plan that is required if you are to inherit the highest degree of the celestial kingdom.

President Joseph F. Smith said,

*I want the young men of Zion to realize that this institution of marriage is not a man-made institution. It is of God. It is honorable, and no man who is of marriageable age is living his religion who remains single. [GD, p. 272]*

It is abundantly clear that young men can understand the gospel plan and know that the celestial kingdom will be a wonderful place to live; but to get there, a man must enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.

Now, brothers and sisters, don't be afraid of the future. I hear some young people say, "With the economic situation the way it is in the world and with the uncertainties in the world, I just feel I must be financially secure before I can enter into a marriage relationship." Let me tell you something about that. The reality is this: you must not look at marriage from a financial point of view, but rather from the eternal point of view. Far too many young men and women in the Church are allowing the economics of marriage to influence the decision of

whether or not to get married. Please keep the financial concern in its proper perspective and do not allow it to be the factor determining when you marry. Look at your eternal destiny in light of the glorious plan of salvation that God has given to you. With this in mind, look for and find that companion who will assist you and strengthen you and be a helpmate to you. Some of you are not working on this as you should. Find your eternal companion, then get married and begin the most fulfilling time of your life.

I think back to 1951 when Sister Ballard came into my life. When I saw her, I fell in love. I have to admit that *I worked very hard to get her to understand that I was the only true returned missionary*. Brethren, sometimes you have to put forth that kind of effort! I have often told our children that the best sales accomplishment of my life was getting their mother to agree to marry me. In my case, I had to work hard to win the heart of my precious companion. Some of you may need to do the same.

We were married in the Salt Lake Temple. I had a part-time job and was attending the university (I won't name which one). She also had a job. Together we were very careful. We saved what we could. We had a hard time and we had some desperate moments. But as we look back on our thirty-six years together, some of the most beautiful times of our lives were during those early days of our marriage when we were your age. Sister Ballard was nineteen and I was twenty-two. Do not miss living through the difficult times with your companion. I believe in many ways Barbara and I became more dependent upon each other and more dependent upon the Lord in those early days of our marriage than perhaps at any other time.

Some are concerned about supporting children. I tell you tonight: do not worry about it. If Barbara and I had sat down and figured out what children would cost and whether we could afford them, we never would have had any. Yet we are now the parents of seven

children and grandparents of twenty-two grandchildren—and within a matter of weeks, twenty-three. Of all our life's accomplishments, our children and our grandchildren are the most precious. We could not afford any of our children, but they are here and doing well. We have given them much love and they have given us much love in return. Today when we gather together as a family, it is glorious to us. We made it work and so can you.

President Benson said recently,

*Young mothers and fathers, with all my heart I counsel you not to postpone having your children, being co-creators with our Father in Heaven.*

*Do not use the reasoning of the world such as "We'll wait until we can better afford having children, until we are more secure, until John has completed his education, until he has a better-paying job, until we have a larger home, until we have obtained a few of the material conveniences," and on and on. This is the reasoning of the world and it is not pleasing in the sight of God. [Address given at a fireside for parents by President Ezra Taft Benson, 22 February 1987]*

In section 131 of the Doctrine and Covenants we read:

*In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;*

*And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];*

*And if he does not, he cannot obtain it.*

*He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase. [D&C 131:1–4]*

Brethren, don't tamper with this truth. Keep thinking straight about fulfilling this most exhilarating, exciting opportunity you will ever have in mortality.

To me, there is no more important thing for you to do than to find your companion,

drawing him or her close to you, and together building an eternal family. The words of our beloved hymn, “Oh My Father,” are true:

*In the heav’ns are parents single?  
No, the thought makes reason stare!  
Truth is reason; truth eternal  
Tells me I’ve a mother there.  
[Hymns, 1985, no. 292]*

May I say a word to you sisters? Please continue to be sweet, clean, pure, and prepared. Live each day with an eternal perspective in mind. I’m aware that there are some here tonight who may never have the opportunity of marriage here in mortality. President Spencer W. Kimball had this to say on the subject:

*Marriage is honorable. It’s a plan of God. It is not a whim, a choice, a preference only; it’s a must.*

*We are talking to normal young people. Generally there are husbands for most young women. There might be an occasional young woman who does not find her companion, but there is little excuse for the normal young man. I tell young women who seem to have missed their chance for desirable marriage that they should do all in their power to make themselves attractive physically in dress and grooming, mentally in being knowledgeable on many subjects, spiritually in being responsive, emotionally in being genuine and worthy. And if one fails to find a companion after having done everything possible, then there will be provision for her in eternity. [“Marriage Is Honorable,” *Speeches of the Year, 1973* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), pp. 261-62]*

President Kimball also said:

*Women of the church who do not in this life have the privileges and blessings of a temple marriage, through no fault of their own, who would have responded if*

*they had an appropriate opportunity—will receive all those blessings in the world to come. [TSWK, p. 295]*

The key, then, for all of us is to live worthily by keeping the commandments.

### **Repentance**

Just three weeks ago, a friend of mine who is now serving as a bishop here at BYU came to my office. The purpose of his visit was to seek some counsel from me on how to deal with the moral transgressions his ward members were confessing to him. The bishop shared the fact that in the five months he’d been bishop, seventeen students had confessed moral transgressions. He was concerned that more women were involved than men.

This report concerned me, so I looked into the matter further and learned that some students have unconfessed transgressions before arriving here and others transgress during their enrollment, but they deliberately wait until they are about to graduate or get married before they clear up their problem with their priesthood leaders. Some have indicated they were afraid to confess earlier because they might face Church discipline that could affect their right to continue as students. I doubt that repentance deferred for that kind of perceived advantage will ever bring the same cleansing power and peace that a more timely confession would produce.

I now understand more and more why Jesus taught repeatedly that we are to declare nothing unto this generation except repentance. I used to think that was a little narrow. Now I am beginning to see the power in it. As men and women understand the principle of repentance and as they apply the principle to their daily lives, repentance is the process of cleansing, purifying, and sanctifying themselves to prepare them to become Saints. Thus we can all become sanctified, cleansed, and purified through the blood of the Lamb.



My plea to you students is to keep the commandments beginning *right now*. If you have a problem that needs to be confessed to your bishop, then I urge you to see him this week. Don't wait, for he will help you repent and start the cleansing process that you need in your life to remain on the path ultimately leading you to the celestial kingdom. Be grateful, brothers and sisters, that the plan provides for repentance and *be wise enough to use it* when you need to in your lives.

### The Plan of Salvation

Some sisters say they are confused because the Church teaches them to prepare to be a wife and a mother but also to prepare to be self-sufficient. Some say a career is so important they will not allow marriage to interfere. As in all aspects of life, we must each find a proper balance and then wisely maintain it. I was interested in a recent article I read. It reported that many women who are very successful in their chosen careers oftentimes feel unfulfilled and desire more than anything else in life to become mothers. This desire is easy for us in the Church to understand because motherhood is a divinely proclaimed blessing. Sisters, there is a need for you to continue preparing yourselves for a happy and fulfilling life, and you can do this best by living true to the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I would rather be a woman not entering into marriage in mortality than a man. I would not want to stand before the Lord as a healthy, normal man and try to explain why I never married. Please understand that temple marriage is absolutely vital in our quest to inherit the highest degree of the celestial kingdom.

Now we may ask, Why do the prophets teach that today is the day of our salvation? Why do they teach us not to procrastinate our repentance or our other important decisions in life? My grandfather, Elder Melvin J. Ballard, said:

*It is my judgment that any man or woman can do more to conform to the laws of God in one year in this life than they could in ten years when they are dead. The spirit only can repent and change, and then the battle has to go forward with the flesh afterwards. It is much easier to overcome and serve the Lord when both flesh and spirit are combined as one. This is the time when men are more pliable and susceptible. [We will find when we are dead every desire, every feeling will be greatly intensified.] When clay is pliable it is much easier to change than when it gets hard and sets.*

*This life is the time to repent. That is why I presume it will take a thousand years. . . to do what it would have taken but three score years and ten to accomplish in this life.*

Grandfather continues:

*The point I have in mind is that we are sentencing ourselves to long periods of bondage, separating our spirits from our bodies, or we are shortening that period, according to the way in which we overcome and master ourselves. [Melvin J. Ballard—Crusader for Righteousness (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), pp. 212–13]*

Let us remember, brothers and sisters, we knew before we were ever born that except we receive a body of flesh and bone and experience mortality we can never become like our Father in Heaven. He has a body of flesh and bones that has been glorified and exalted. He is our father; we seek to be like him. He has told us we can be like him. He has given us the plan, the central figure of which is his only begotten son, even Jesus Christ.

The Savior is the key to making the plan work in our lives. The more the mysteries of the kingdom of God unfold to us and the more we understand God's plan for us, the more adoration, affection, love, and commitment will fill our hearts for his beloved son Jesus Christ.

I pray that our Heavenly Father will bless every one of us with an increase of love for the Lord and a keen desire to serve him, to keep his commandments, and to live true to the plan of redemption and exaltation that is ours.

In section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants we read:

*Now, verily I say unto you, that through the redemption which is made for you is brought to pass the resurrection from the dead.*

*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, 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. [D&C 88:14–22]*

So it is quite simple—if we want a celestial glory in the eternities, then we must live by the celestial law now. The plan of salvation is the glorious process by which men and women walk through mortality with the light of the gospel giving correct spiritual direction. Jesus has shown us the way to live here upon the earth.

Brothers and sisters, we can inherit a celestial glory, we can dwell where God and Christ dwell and live with them forever and ever. All of these promises, however, are predicated upon our willingness to love God with all our hearts, to keep his commandments, to repent of our sins, and to love and serve our neighbors and our fellowmen. The first principles and ordinances of the gospel are clear and simple to follow. Through our obedience and willingness to keep the commandments and to serve, love, and honor the Lord, we can purify our lives.

### **May God Bless You**

God bless you to love this church and all that it teaches you. You will never possess anything in life remotely as precious as your understanding of the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ and the plan of salvation God has for his children. Love the Lord and follow his plan, including getting married and having a family.

We are grateful that you students are enrolled here at BYU. We want you to enjoy your time here. We hope you will study hard and learn as much as you can about your chosen field of education. We pray that in all of your learning, you will learn for yourselves that you have a glorious eternal potential. You must study hard and pray continuously to know the fullness of our Father's plan. When you and I understand this eternal truth of the gospel and bind ourselves to keeping all of the commandments, we will find joy and happiness in this life beyond comprehension. The more you love and serve the Lord—you missionaries here tonight will soon learn this as you embark on your labors in your missions—the more you will prepare yourselves to dwell in his sacred presence.

You are wonderful young people. There are none better—we know that. General Authorities of the Church often talk about you, this great generation of young people. We love you, we have confidence in you. We want you to be the very best you can be. If there is something

holding you back from being your very best, I'm here tonight to say that with this new school year, what better time is there to clear up any problem you might have? Then you can get on with the positive things in your life.

We hope you will take every advantage while on this campus to prepare yourselves intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually for the challenges that lie ahead. You are in training here at BYU. Your spiritual preparation and training are an essential part of your education to prepare yourselves to lead your own families as well as to assume other leadership responsibilities that will surely be given to you in the Church.

I testify to you that what I have been talking about here tonight is true. I know that Jesus is the Christ. Brothers and sisters, you simply cannot do the work that members of the Council of the Twelve and other General Authorities are called upon to do if you do not know that Christ lives. He is very close to this work, and I love him. No greater honor could ever come to a man than to be asked to bear witness of our Savior's name throughout all the nations of the earth. I do that with great humility and gratitude. I witness to you tonight that he is the Son of God. This is his church. The plan of salvation that we have been talking about is from our Father in Heaven and our Lord Jesus Christ. The commandments are for our good, and if we will repent when we need to and then live true to every commandment, we will surely rejoice when the day comes for each one of us to pass by the angels into the sacred presence of our Heavenly Father and his beloved son Jesus Christ.

God bless you. May he bless you to always think clearly about your life, that you may progressively learn to live in complete harmony with the teachings of the gospel. May the Lord

bless you with peace and happiness while here at BYU. Live the standards here. Don't fight them, brothers and sisters, live them. Keep the commandments of God and you will gain a positive assurance that the gospel of Jesus Christ is God's plan of happiness for his children here upon the earth. This I know to be true. Because of my great affection and love for you, the youth of the Church, and the great affection I have for the missionaries of the Church throughout the world—some thirty-three thousand now—my prayer is that you'll catch the vision, that you will see the big picture, now. Don't wait—get it now and understand that each of you has glorious eternal potential. Do those things that you need to do in your own life. Correct those things that need to be corrected. Be a better you as we start a new year here at this great university.

I invoke a blessing upon you now. Humbly, I plead with the Lord to, bless you, my beloved young people, the youth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—the cream of the crop of all of the youth of the world, as far as I'm concerned. May he bless you to cherish the plan of salvation—to know it, to study it, to strive with all the power within you to live true to it, that you might make the contribution to this world and particularly to this church that is uniquely yours to make. You can do this through your faithfulness, through your attention to spiritual things, and through your willingness to strive with all the power that you have to love and serve your Father in Heaven and his beloved son Jesus Christ. May this be your blessing, may this be a blessing to your leaders and to me, that we all might go forward together in accomplishing the glorious purposes of God. This is my humble prayer, my testimony, and my blessing upon you, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Amen.



