

Temples of Learning

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Sister Bateman and I are particularly pleased to welcome you to the new 2002–2003 school year at Brigham Young University. Normally the two of us share the podium during the devotionals. Because of a health challenge, Sister Bateman has asked that I represent the two of us today. We have been sweethearts for more than 40 years. Her experience during the last month has reinforced in my mind and heart how much she means to me and our family. Our prayers have become prayers of thankfulness. We are grateful that she is on the mend.

We extend a special welcome this morning to more than 5,000 new freshmen admitted to the university. We also welcome 3,500 returning missionaries, 1,500 transfer students, and 20,000 students returning from last year. You come from all 50 states and more than 110 countries and represent the peoples, languages, and cultures of the world. In addition, you understand the most important language of all—that of the Spirit.

Recently BYU received the results of a national survey rating universities according to five important “learning” categories. The purpose of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is to measure the quality of academics at the various colleges and universities in America. Brigham Young University ranks high in all five areas. We are rated at the

99th percentile as one of the most “supportive campus environments” in the United States. This is the second year in a row in which BYU is a benchmark school. We are at the 91st percentile with regard to the “level of academic challenge.” This means that BYU’s academic expectations are among the highest in the nation.

This is important information for two reasons. First, it reflects the quality of the extraordinary faculty and staff at the university. Second, it is a warning—especially to freshmen and transfers—that the standards are high and you must put forth your best effort. You have been admitted because we believe you can succeed in this special environment, but it will require daily effort on your part. In high school it might have been possible for some to wait until the day before the examination to study. For those who procrastinate here, 19 out of 20 will not perform satisfactorily. A great many of you were “A” students before coming. This is a very competitive but supportive environment. All can succeed, but you must study two to three hours outside of class for every hour in class. I promise each of you that if you will be diligent in your studies,

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ask questions, and meet with faculty when you do not understand, you will have an incredible learning experience here.

In a different survey that has a much longer history, the university once again was named the number-one “stone-cold sober” school (see *The Best 345 Colleges* [New York: Random House/Princeton Review, 2002]; also see “The Best 345 College Rankings” at <http://www.princetonreview.com/college/research/rankings/rankingTeaser.asp?CategoryID=4&TopicID=27>). A little thought suggests that this ranking is related to the high score received as the most “supportive campus environment.” The truth of the matter is that we can work hard and have fun without alcohol as a crutch. Today “forty-four percent of college students—and a whopping 75 percent of students in fraternities and sororities—are binge-drinkers. In April, the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism underscored the seriousness of this issue by reporting that campus drinking contributes to 1,400 deaths, 500,000 injuries, and 70,000 cases of sexual assault yearly” (Robert Franek, “Publishing List of ‘Party Schools’ Is a Public Service,” *Deseret News*, 6 September 2002, A12).

How grateful we are for the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ that guide our lifestyle and provide us with the best campus in America.

Today I wish to address two topics. The first is the impact and import of the events that occurred one year ago. The second concerns this campus and its students as temples of learning.

9/11

Tomorrow is the one-year anniversary of the terrible events that occurred in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania, when terrorists hijacked four airplanes in an attempt to rob America of its safety and security. On September 11, 2001, Sister Bateman and I were scheduled to give the first devotional of the school year. We awoke early to prepare for

the day. During the morning we turned on the television to listen to the news. It was not long before the cameras shifted to New York and the north tower of the World Trade Center, which had just been hit. The announcer noted that an airplane had crashed into the tower, puncturing the building just below the 100th floor. They were uncertain as to whether it was an accident or a deliberate act. A short time later, while the cameras were still focused on the twin towers, another plane came into view headed for the second tower. What followed was an unbelievable sight. United Flight 175 continued its course, crashing into the south tower. At that point it was apparent that the acts were deliberate, the planes had been hijacked, hundreds of lives had been taken, and thousands were now in danger. The floors that had been hit became drenched with airplane fuel, and soon the towers were raging infernos in the upper reaches of the buildings. All of us watching feared for the lives of those who were on the upper floors. Little did we understand what was about to happen. Within an hour the blazing heat generated by the fireball melted the steel infrastructure, bringing the south tower crashing to the ground. The north tower followed 29 minutes later.

As Sister Bateman and I watched, we became concerned about the students at BYU. It did not seem appropriate to move forward with the regular devotional, but we felt a strong need to gather the BYU community together to briefly discuss the events and then counsel together regarding the challenges that lay ahead. In the special devotional one year ago, we indicated that there was no reason to fear for our lives or the lives of loved ones unless they were in the planes or at the sites of impact.

We also noted the importance of being respectful of all people. We have students from most countries on campus. How important it was then and now to be kind and considerate of every individual. For thousands of years

innocent people have been ill-treated because of ethnicity, nationality, or religious persuasion. Our own history reveals the ignorance and intolerance endured by our ancestors as they were driven from Missouri to Nauvoo to the Rocky Mountains. Intolerance on this campus is an anachronism—something out of place, something not suited to this location. This campus is and must continue to be a haven of peace and understanding where each individual is seen and treated as a child of God.

One year ago we stated that the only answer to these terrible acts is the good news—the gospel of Jesus Christ. This earth will find peace only when its citizens come to know the Prince of Peace. But we need not wait for others to find peace. By living the gospel each of us may receive an inner assurance that all is well. We have access to the Holy Ghost, who is the Comforter. Near the end of the Last Supper, Jesus turned to His disciples and said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). Even though He knew of the agony and trial of the next few hours, Jesus told His disciples that they would find peace. As Latter-day Saints, we are part of the greatest mission for peace the world has ever known.

Looking back one year, what are the lessons learned? The first is that we can make the world safer than it was, but it is not easy to root out evil when a small group of people separate themselves from civilized society, are well funded, live in a wilderness, and strike with an element of surprise against innocent people. The Book of Mormon tells about a similar terrorist group and the chaos that ensued when the general society also turned away from God. Fortunately, we know that in the last days the kingdom of God will not be destroyed but will spread across the earth—touching every nation, kindred, tongue, and people and preparing the earth for the return of its Creator. In the long run, al-Qaeda will not succeed.

A second lesson was taught by the New York firefighters and policemen who put duty before life. As the occupants of the towers were coming down the stairwells, they met the firemen going up. A new set of heroes was born. Recently an eight-year-old boy was leaving Shea Stadium in New York after a Mets baseball game. As he was crossing the street, he saw a police officer directing traffic. The boy approached him and asked the officer if he would sign his baseball glove.

The policeman looked at the young boy and said, “Don’t you want a ballplayer’s autograph? Why a cop’s?”

The boy answered, “Because you saved the world.”

There is a greater respect and awareness today for those civil servants who risk their lives in the course of duty.

Another lesson comes from the testimony of Church members who lost loved ones. Sister Mary Alice Wahlstrom and her daughter were on American Flight 11 from Boston to Los Angeles when it was diverted by hijackers and flown into the north tower of the World Trade Center. Almost a year later Margaret Wahlstrom, Sister Wahlstrom’s daughter-in-law, stated the following: “I wish I could give everybody a testimony of the gospel. You’re taught all these things throughout your life, and all of a sudden you have to live them. When something bad happens, you find out how strong your testimony is and if you believe in the Atonement—and you find out that you do.”

There are some problems associated with the events of 9/11 yet to be resolved. The World Trade Center has been cleaned up, but some people still live in fear that another tragedy will occur. Al-Qaeda’s forces have been reduced, but pockets of terrorists remain and continue to plan events. The world economy, although headed into recession prior to 9/11, was dealt a severe blow by those events and is still trying to recover.

On the other hand, the civilized world is more unified than before, more willing to stand

together against those who would destroy our way of life. And from the ashes of last September has arisen a stronger America—one more committed to freedom, one more caring of those in need. Perhaps most important of all, a younger generation has been exposed to acts of war and tyrants who want to force their beliefs on others. The events of 9/11 will always be a warning in their memories that freedom is not guaranteed but must be protected. Finally, many people have been led to ask questions about the purpose of life and are searching for answers.

Temples of Learning

Now I turn to my second topic for the day: temples. I wish to share with you my view of BYU as a temple of learning. I also wish to point out that you, as individuals, are holy temples of God yourselves and therefore should protect your bodies and souls because they are sacred. The dictionary defines a temple as “a building or place dedicated to worship or the presence of deity.” As you know, LDS temples are dedicated homes to deity. On every temple appear the words “House of the Lord.” LDS temples are also places where sacred priesthood ordinances are performed. Temples in our religion have three major purposes.

The first is to provide men and women with a vision of their eternal potential.

The second is to provide instruction as to how we can achieve the goals God has set for us.

The third is to link us through ordinances and covenants to the grace and power of Christ’s Atonement so that we may receive a fulness.

Now, consider how BYU might be a temple of learning. Is it a home for deity? Does it have a responsibility to help young people understand their potential in both mortality and eternity? Does it have a sacred as well as a secular responsibility to help you reach your ultimate destiny? Is there power in teaching you how to learn and providing you with knowledge concerning heaven and earth? The answer to each question is, “Yes!” Brigham Young told Karl G.

Maeser that Brigham Young University was to be a home for the Holy Spirit (see Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1953], 26). This member of the Godhead should be present in every classroom and pervade the university. His presence softens and enhances relationships between faculty and students and affects student-to-student relationships as well. His presence also enhances the learning process. The seeking of knowledge—both temporal and spiritual—is a sacred responsibility given to every woman and man. On this subject the Lord has said:

And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.

Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God.

The scripture then shifts to secular matters:

Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms.

And then the Lord indicates why we are to learn both spiritual and secular subjects:

That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you. [D&C 88:77–80]

Everyone here today and everyone hearing this broadcast has been called by the Lord to a special mission. The more we know about things in heaven and in the earth, the more

effective we will be in accomplishing the commission given us. The Aims of a BYU education are designed to this end. They are to increase your intellectual capacities and understandings, to enlarge you spiritually, to build your character, and to help you become lifelong learners and lifetime servants.

Two weeks ago I shared with the freshmen during their orientation one of the most sacred moments I have experienced on this campus. I wish to share it again because it illustrates the blessing and power of this university as a temple of learning. Almost two years ago the Palmyra Temple was dedicated. Prior to the dedication First Presidency instructions were for students to gather in local Provo chapels to view the services. After some investigation it was determined that few students would be able to attend because local Saints would fill the chapels. Consequently I asked President Hinckley if the services could be shown in the Marriott Center. Although there was some concern that it would be difficult to feel the spirit of the services in this large space, permission was granted.

Students with recommends were asked to be in their seats at least 30 minutes before the services began. The outside doors of the building were locked 20 minutes before. I arrived early and took a seat on the floor. As I entered this space through one of the tunnels, I immediately noticed the extreme quiet in the room. There were no sounds. There was no whispering. Almost every student had a set of scriptures, and each was quietly reading or pondering the events of the next two hours. A quiet, reverent attitude prevailed throughout the dedication. Following the dedicatory prayer, 20,000 students stood in this arena and with white handkerchiefs waving repeated the Hosanna Shout. It was electric! The sea of handkerchiefs was like fields of grain waving in the wind. I have attended a number of temple dedications, but not one like that.

Following the closing hymn and prayer, the Holy Spirit pervaded every corner of this room. We watched President Hinckley and others depart the celestial room of the Palmyra Temple. I then approached the microphone and excused those in attendance to return to their classes. The few of us on the floor stood and waited for the audience to leave. But no one moved. After another minute or two I returned to the microphone again and invited those in attendance to return to class. Slowly, quietly, people arose and left the building. It was one of the great, spiritual moments of my time at the university. This building literally became an extension of the Palmyra Temple during those two hours.

I now understand better the dream given to Karl G. Maeser in the 1880s during a very difficult financial period for the university. Brother Maeser became so discouraged with the lack of resources for the university that he decided to take a job at the University of Utah. He told his wife and daughter to pack the household goods and prepare to move. This they did, and then they waited two days. On the third day the daughter finally asked when they would leave. Brother Maeser replied: "I have changed my mind. I have had a dream—I have seen Temple Hill [upper campus] filled with buildings—great temples of learning, and I have decided to remain and do my part in contributing to the fulfillment of that dream" (from *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, eds. Ernest L. Wilkinson and Leonard J. Arrington, vol. 3 [Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976], 3).

Brigham Young University is a great temple of learning. Each building has been dedicated to the Lord as a house of learning. The university will fulfill its destiny. How will you do your part?

I noted earlier that each of us is a temple of God. Our bodies have been so designated because they are designed to house the Holy Ghost as well as our own spirit. In scripture,

Jesus was the first to speak of the body as a temple. After cleansing the Jerusalem temple of the money changers and merchants, the Jews asked Jesus for a sign of His authority. He said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). The Jewish questioners thought He was referring to the building, but we know that He was referring to His body.

Writing to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul described sexual sin as a sin against one’s own body and then used the temple metaphor to indicate the seriousness of such acts. He said:

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s. [1 Corinthians 6:19–20]

To some the last sentence may seem strange. If we own anything on this earth, one would expect it to be our body and our spirit. In a sense that is true. We are our own person. But Paul is pointing out that Christ’s Atonement determines what we become. We still have our agency, but He paid for our future possibilities. In that sense He owns us. We still must submit to Him. We still must give ourselves to Him.

In the garden and on the cross, the Savior’s Atonement made possible our sanctification through the power of His blood and the help of the Holy Ghost. If we strive to live the gospel, our bodies become temples in which the Spirit of God resides. The price paid by the Savior insures that our bodies and spirits will overcome death and be raised to a higher state. By living close to the Holy Ghost, the day will come when we will be changed from mortals to immortals, and our souls will receive a celestial glory. In terms of everything that counts, Christ owns us.

Brothers and sisters, treat your bodies with the utmost care. The world does not understand

what we have just discussed. It does not understand the Atonement. It does not appreciate the sacred nature of the body. Not only does the body house the Holy Spirit, but it also contains the sacred power of life. The power to give life is a godly power granted to us for a season. How we protect and use it is of utmost importance to our salvation.

When we understand that the body is a temple, we will not deface it. When we understand the sacredness of the body, we will understand the importance of modest dress. We will understand the incongruity of individuals stripping to the waist and painting their faces and bodies at football games. We will do all in our power to stay away from pornographic materials of all kinds. In this regard, one of the most serious challenges facing young people today, especially young men, is the availability of pornographic material. It is more addictive than cocaine. Do not take it into your temple. It has the power to destroy you. It destroys relationships between men and women. It distorts the mind. Stay away from it. If you know of anyone caught in this mire, do not pass them by. Insist that they get help. People caught in this web find it very difficult to break the chains that bind them, but there are professionals who can help.

May I thank you for the exceptional people you are. An integral part of the life of this university is the presence of the Holy Ghost abiding in you. Brigham Young University is a temple of learning. We are temples. The Lord told Joseph Smith that every person is entitled to a gift of the Spirit (see D&C 46:11). As we assemble in the weekly devotional, each person brings a gift that can be shared with others. That is how we become a Zion people. That’s why we have wards and stakes, so we can share those gifts. No wonder the alumni tell us that the most important activity on campus for their spiritual development was the weekly devotional. I implore you to attend every week in the Marriott Center and turn this room into a temple. Bring

your scriptures. Come in your Sunday dress. Robert Foster, our BYUSA president, invited the freshmen two weeks ago to do the same. I promise all who come a clearer vision of their destiny and more power to achieve it.

In closing, may we remember and honor those whose lives were lost in last year's

tragedy. May we live in a manner that will add to the Spirit in this temple of learning. May each of us be worthy receptacles of the Holy Ghost. This I say in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.