

This Special and Great University

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Graduates, families, brothers, sisters, and friends, it is my happy opportunity and responsibility on this special day to add again my warm welcome and greeting to all of you and my congratulations to those we honor. We are especially grateful for the presence of Elder Richard G. Scott of the Twelve and chairman of the executive committee of the board of trustees, who presides. His support, counsel, and occasional correction are most appreciated and greatly helpful.

As always, we are grateful for the presence and constant encouragement and support we receive from Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve, commissioner of church education. We also are pleased to have Sister Bonnie Parkin, Relief Society general president, and Sister Susan Tanner, Young Women general president, with us as members of the board of trustees. We also recognize and thank the many other friends and honored guests who are with us today.

In addition to those listed in the program as graduates, I would like to mention a person who is attending his last graduation for an extended period. Academic vice president Alan Lee Wilkins has accepted a call from the First Presidency to preside over a mission in Argentina, beginning July 1 of this year. The

entire university community will miss him and his wife, Margaret, but I feel a special and personal loss as he has become a close confidant, friend, and associate since my arrival. Although we are honored by his call and support it with enthusiasm, we also admit to missing him already. Alan, would you please stand and allow us to recognize you for your most significant contributions to BYU over these many years?

I would also like to ask Professor John S. Tanner to stand. No stranger to BYU or academic leadership at the university, he has agreed to become our new academic vice president on June 1. Please join me in welcoming Vice President Tanner.

Brothers Wilkins and Tanner come from different disciplines and colleges here at BYU, but both are wonderful examples of what BYU graduates are and can become. Both are rigorous scholars, men of integrity, and exemplary Latter-day Saints. I am very grateful for the opportunity to serve with them.

As some of you might know, I am just completing my first year here at BYU. It has

Cecil O. Samuelson was the president of Brigham Young University when this BYU commencement address was given on 22 April 2004.

been and is wonderful! The surprises continue, but the special spirit is consistent and sustaining. I am constantly amazed at the general excellence and pervasive goodness of our students, faculty, staff, and administration. I think that there must not be another community anywhere in the world like this one. Sharon and I express our gratitude for the high privilege of being part of all of this.

I continue to be positively impressed as I learn more about this great university. I thought you might like to know a few interesting facts about this year's senior class, based on our most recent BYU senior survey.

Almost half of you graduates are now married, and 16 percent have children. Our historical data predict that in the next three years 83 percent of you will be married, so we suggest particularly that the parents of the single women start to plan ahead as you juggle your finances!

You have learned much about many things while here at BYU. As evidence of this, most of you have wonderfully adjusted your thinking about important things and have lifted your sights. Just one example: When you arrived at BYU, only a third of you planned on continuing with graduate education. Now 71 percent of you have that expectation. We commend all of you for your increasing thirst for lifelong education—whatever your specific plans and immediate goals—and we assure the moms and dads here that we do understand the difference between education for eternity and creating eternal students!

As well as most of you have done, it would not have been possible without our most capable and devoted faculty. I am tremendously impressed that well over half of you students have reported that you have spent one or more semesters—and some, several—working regularly with a faculty member outside of class. We thank you and our faculty for learning together and for teaching each other.

BYU is not a perfect place, and Gerrit Gong regularly reminds me that our concrete sidewalks on campus develop cracks like they do everywhere else. Although we do have much to be meek and modest about, I am also thrilled that 95 percent of you feel your BYU experiences have helped you prepare well for future family life. Brigham Young University does attempt to assist and prepare you for all aspects of your future life, in addition to your purely academic endeavors.

In this context I am pleased that most of you have reported that your BYU experiences have “strongly enhanced” your spiritual development. Of the examples you have chosen, let me mention those that you identified with high frequency. They include your religion courses, student wards, Church Educational System and university firesides, campus devotionals, and the many informal interactions with roommates, classmates, and other students. As important as your major studies are, BYU is about so much more!

The last statistic I will mention with pleasure is that most of you are far, far below the national average for student debt, especially on credit cards. Much commendation is due to you and those who have helped you learn correct principles in this area. For those still trying to learn to manage finances prudently, it is never too late, and it will never be easier than now!

Let me conclude by reminding you of a different kind of debt you have all incurred—different in that it cannot be tallied in a checkbook or a bank balance, but real just the same. I speak of the tremendous debt owed by each of you to your spouses, parents, families, and other direct financial benefactors. I speak also of the faithful members of the Church worldwide, many living in relative poverty and without a realistic hope of themselves or their families ever enjoying a BYU education. They pay their tithes and offerings with complete confidence in the leaders of the Church

who are so carefully and generously making the incomparable BYU experience possible for us. I hope that we will always remember their sacrifice and generosity in our prayers.

Beyond that, I hope we will commit ourselves today and continue this commitment throughout our lives to contribute in every way that we can to building the kingdom of God on earth and also in supporting our alma mater. Gratitude is easily verbalized but often difficult to actualize. You remember the account of Jesus meeting the 10 men with leprosy (see Luke 17:11–19). All of them called on the Lord and pled for mercy or to be cured. The Savior told them what to do, and they did it—resulting in the cleansing of their leprosy. Sadly, there was only one of the 10 who thought to return and thank the Lord. Think of Jesus’ question to the one thoughtful and grateful man. Said Jesus, “Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?” (Luke 17:17).

BYU and its graduates excel in almost every category and consideration. I am convinced that we will never forget our significant debt and we will ever recognize the privilege it is to be part of this grand enterprise called Brigham Young University. I am sure that you will wish always to stand with the grateful one and not the negligent nine.

We promise you that we will not forget you and we will do all we can to remind you of your blessings. We ask that you also keep us in your thoughts and prayers and help us become even better with your continued participation and your splendid examples as you go throughout the world during your especially blessed lives.

Again I congratulate you and those supporting and sustaining you. I invoke the blessings of heaven upon you, your families, and your brilliant futures. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.