

# *The Changing World*

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Graduates, families, brothers, sisters, and friends, this is a wonderful afternoon of significant celebration. We are grateful to all of you for your presence and particularly for you, our graduates, who have made today's exercises both possible and necessary.

I am privileged again to thank our special guests who are in attendance and who are showing their deep and consistent support not only for those being specifically honored but also for those who have significantly sponsored and assisted these who have reached this most noteworthy academic achievement. Parents, spouses, and children have sacrificed consistently to ease the way for their students. Likewise, faculty, staff, and classmates join in the satisfaction of these accomplishments and deserve all of our appreciation.

We are grateful for Sister Bonnie Parkin of the BYU Board of Trustees and Relief Society general president who by assignment conducts these services and from whom we will receive counsel and encouragement a little later. We note with appreciation the presence of Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who is chairman of the Board of Trustees Executive Committee and presides at these exercises today. We also recognize Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Twelve, Elder David E.

Sorensen of the Presidency of the Seventy, and Elder W. Rolfe Kerr of the Seventy and commissioner of Church Education. Spouses of the Brethren and Sister Parkin are seated in the audience, as are Sisters Kathleen H. Hughes and Anne C. Pingree of the Relief Society general presidency.

I also offer special thanks to our commencement committee; our musicians, ushers, media, and facility experts; and all who have labored tirelessly to make today the special, dignified, and wonderful event that it always is.

I wish to share something of the uniqueness of this group of graduates and honorees. Our youngest graduate today is 19 years old; some others approximate my own age. You come from 48 states and 62 countries. You are almost equally divided between men and women, and half of you undergraduates have attended other institutions of higher learning in addition to BYU.

Slightly over half of you baccalaureate candidates are married, and this percentage

---

*Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this commencement address was given on 11 August 2005.*

rises to almost three-fourths of the graduate-degree recipients. Many of you already have children, and we especially commend those who have done so well in balancing the rigors of education while fulfilling fundamental family responsibilities.

Thanks to so many of you for responding to our Senior Survey. From it we have learned that 90 percent of you feel well prepared for the obligations of family, Church, profession, and community service. I am particularly delighted that well over half of you report no credit card debt and many others report credit card debt of less than \$500. Although there are sometimes circumstances that require some debt, including educational expenses, we are grateful that as a class you have been and are planning to be financially prudent. I am particularly pleased to report that the number of BYU students who default on student loans is near zero. It is actually three-tenths of 1 percent or one-17th of the national average.

BYU, in itself, is unique not only because of its mission but also because of those who choose to come here and are qualified to do so. Increasingly, our students and faculty are closely scrutinized by an ever-widening audience because so many who might like to come to BYU are not able to do so. This means that those who are accorded this special privilege have a significant accountability not only to themselves and to those who specifically sponsor and support them individually but also a high responsibility to all those who contribute resources to the great institution of Brigham Young University, including and especially those providing “the widow’s mite.”

Today I am pleased to report to this broad constituency my assessment of the general goodness and high quality of this distinguished student body. As the Lord said of the Church at the time of its organization, “I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually” (D&C 1:30), I believe I can say to the board of

trustees, to the membership of the Church, to the parents of our students, and to all other interested parties that they should be generally well pleased with the BYU student body.

I must hasten to add that even our best students, faculty, and staff are not perfect. We all understand that a large measure of meekness and humility is important for everyone in the BYU community because there is still so much that we need to do individually and collectively to meet the God-given potential that is being rightfully enhanced at this remarkable and unique institution.

This year we are celebrating a number of important anniversaries. It is the bicentennial of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. It is the 175th anniversary of the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the 130th anniversary of the establishment of Brigham Young Academy, and the 95th birthday of our beloved prophet, president, and board of trustees chairman: Gordon B. Hinckley. For those of you being honored today, the class of 2005, this year will always be special to you as well.

A useful exercise for you graduates and for all of us is to consider how quickly the world in which we live is changing. Think of how much has happened just since you last graduated, whether from high school or with a previous postsecondary degree. Almost all who are receiving baccalaureate degrees today left high school prior to September 11, 2001. Those horrific events, coupled with continuing terrorist attacks and wars or rumors of wars in diverse places, have changed the focus of governments, newscasts, and travel plans.

Other dramatic changes are occurring in our world and will continue to do so—likely at an even more accelerated pace. Inventions and scientific breakthroughs are made constantly. New jobs or occupations are emerging almost daily whereas others are disappearing. Recently Sister Samuelson and I had dinner with other couples who are old friends. That

is a terrible thing to say, but we did all go to school together. Two have already retired and two more will do so within the year. Each has been in his or her same job for well over 20 years, and two have been with the same organization for more than 30 years.

Although they are leaving the employed workforce for multiple reasons, each observes that the world has changed dramatically and that the stability and expectations they had when graduating from university and entering the world of work no longer exist. Current information suggests that it will be very rare for any of you to work for the same firm or institution or even stay in the same occupation throughout your careers. In fact, it is quite likely that most of you will go through three, four, or more significant employment transitions before retiring.

How do you view the changing world? I hope it is with optimism and encouragement rather than with the disappointment or dismay that we find in some circles. It is true that each of us will need to be adaptable and proactive in our approaches to the future. It is also true that the most portable and precious skill that you will take with you as you leave Brigham Young University is your well-honed capacity to learn continually and to accommodate your attributes and your talents to the changing world before you.

You have learned important and significant approaches, facts, skills, procedures, theories, and truths. Some of the most important and some that make BYU both unique and necessary are not changeable—nor will they change. These are the moral and ethical values that are deeply imbedded within you; the bedrock details of your testimonies of the reality of our Father in Heaven and His Son, our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ; the vitality and actuality of the restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith in our day; the absolute veracity of the Book of Mormon and the other canonized revelations; and the wonderful

blessings of living in a time and in the midst of living prophets. Many other things will change and must, but these will not and cannot.

On the other hand, much of what seems so current and breathtaking now in each of your respective disciplines and fields will rather soon be replaced or significantly supplemented by new theories, truths, information, or perspectives. Most of the avant-garde approaches in medicine that were the rage when I graduated from medical school 35 years ago have been replaced or significantly improved. I believe this to be true in virtually every field of inquiry or endeavor, and it is wonderful!

I know that some may find this disquieting. I think we should find it exhilarating. After all, almost all of us believe in continuing revelation, and this applies to all of our work and lives. It is an institutional doctrine, but it is also a direct promise that we can be continually taught and tutored by the Holy Ghost in addition to the other methods you are beginning to master.

It was Brigham Young himself who said:

*Not only does the religion of Jesus Christ make the people acquainted with the things of God, and develop within them moral excellence and purity, but it holds out every encouragement and inducement possible, for them to increase in knowledge and intelligence, in every branch of mechanism, or in the arts and sciences, for all wisdom, and all the arts and sciences in the world are from God, and are designed for the good of His people. [JD 13:147]*

We believe that our doctrine is clear and that your experiences at BYU have prepared you well to serve with personal satisfaction and significant distinction as you go forth to contribute to your families, your communities, your Church, and your countries. You have learned to learn. More important though, you know how to continue to learn. We encourage you to keep your hearts and minds flexible where you should and fixed where you must.

As you do, you will be blessed and sustained and will meet the potential and responsibility inherent in being a graduate of Brigham Young University.

We express our love and our admiration as well as our encouragement as you take your places on the wonderful stage of life in these remarkable days of the early 21st century. I leave my testimony and blessings with you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.