

The Business of Being

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My beloved fellow students of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I salute you. Yes, I salute you in the knowledge that in addition to studying the gospel of Jesus Christ, you are earnestly striving to apply that which you study and learn. I have a great admiration for you, and I deem it a privilege to be with you on this occasion. Incidentally, I have decided to speak in English English, although I realize that those who are not foreign students may also need an interpreter on occasion.

In the preparation of my remarks I have sought for the guidance of the Spirit and for a confirmation of that which I should convey to you today. I have sought for a subject which would be of general interest, this being appropriate since I am a General Authority. I realize that my challenge and opportunity is not merely to impart knowledge, but also to develop wisdom, and not only to develop wisdom, but also to evoke virtue. Emerson explained this when he stated:

He has knowledge, he has wisdom, but he has missed Virtue, which he only acquires who endures routine and sweat and postponement of fancy to the achievement of a worthy end. [Emerson, E. W., And Forbes, W. E., Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 7 (1845–1848): 115]

So that you will be better prepared for that which is to come, I will now announce the topic I shall address. It may sound a little deep, but have no fear; the meaning and application will become crystal clear as we proceed. My topic is “The Business of Being.” Suffice it to say that whether we are studying social science or seismology, mathematics or music, biology or botany, linguistics or law, we are all, without exception, deeply involved in business, namely, the business of being.

In my remarks I have drawn largely from my own personal experience, and particularly from my experience in the world of industry and commerce. This was my domain for a quarter of a century before I was called into full-time service for the Lord. I know that when one uses the term *century*, even to the extent of one quarter, it does tend to date one. I feel I must therefore mention that when I was called as a General Authority in April of 1978, along with three other brethren whose average

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age was 54, we were referred to as “these young brethren.”

Maturity

Now, as an introduction to the business of being, I shall briefly explain the concept of maturity. It is important for us to understand it so that we can use it as a foundation for our further discussion. I remember during my college days, a little over thirty years ago, I was classified as a “mature student.” I learned that I apparently qualified for this distinguished status since I had served for three and a half years in the Royal Air Force and was also married with a baby daughter. Those responsible for classifying me as having attained maturity had obviously not checked the official definition which, as we all know, is “the quality or state of . . . full development” (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*).

In that true sense of the word, was I a mature student? Had my service in India, Burma, and Hong Kong in the armed forces matured me? Wartime experiences certainly age one in many ways, and travel is said to broaden the mind. However, it does not necessarily deepen it.

Again, had my wonderful marriage to my childhood sweetheart brought me to maturity? It had certainly added to my responsibilities, presented many opportunities, and evoked significant decisions.

It is relatively easy to tell when a fruit is mature or ripe, and it becomes very clear when it becomes overripe. There are certain sensory tests which will indicate such maturity! How about us? Do we automatically mature and ripen over a period of time? Is it possible for a young person to be more mature than an older person? Or a small person to be more mature than a taller one?

There comes to mind the boy Jesus in the temple, “sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). The learned doctors of the

Jewish law were astonished at his maturity. By what standards should we measure? In high school and college, I was subjected to numerous examinations and tests as you have been and are being and doubtless will be in the future.

Grades were awarded, some not so high as hoped for, others miraculously higher. Are academic attainments the measure of maturity? I think of the learned Saul of Tarsus, taught at the feet of Gamaliel, whose learning prompted him to persecute the Christians. How wonderful that he should declare, after his miraculous conversion, “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). I repeat, then, are academic attainments the measure of maturity?

As with you, however, not all of my time as a student was in the lecture room or library. I spent many hours at the track, training for athletic events. As a result I was selected for the team, not only in athletics, but in rugby football and cricket. (Incidentally, in rugby football, which is akin to your football, we wore no padding, whereas for cricket, the so-called gentlemen’s game, we did wear padding. This may change your ideas on British sports!) Are sporting achievements, then, the measure of maturity?

I am reminded of a letter from a fine young lady, divorced after only two years of marriage, who complained, “All my husband thought about was sport, sport, sport. He wasn’t interested in the partnership of marriage.” Perhaps we could conclude that he wasn’t mature enough for marriage, even though he was a great ballplayer.

What of social pursuits? During my formal education I had gained some knowledge of the social graces, an appreciation of the arts, a certain ability to communicate with others. Are these the keys to maturity?

As is so often the case, the Savior’s life provides the answer, for Luke tells us that “Jesus

increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). Here then is the key: balanced progression in the four fields of human endeavor—mental, physical, spiritual, and social.

The Spiritual Dimension

Brigham Young University excels in providing such a balanced program. Few universities can claim such a curriculum. I pray that we may all take full advantage of it and realize that we are greatly blessed to have such high standards expected of us.

When I was a full-time student in England from 1948 to 1950 at the University of Nottingham, I did not have the good fortune to be a Latter-day Saint. I did not have the vision of my purpose in life and of the pattern of progress and effort required to fulfill my purpose. Academically, athletically, socially, I did reasonably well. Spiritually, I was somewhat lacking, for I had a form of religion without real substance. I had been active in my church all my life but could not have answered basic doctrinal questions if challenged to do so.

My real progress commenced when I was almost 24 years old. I had just graduated with honors in economics and law and had started my career in industry as a management trainee with a large textiles, chemicals, and plastics company. Within weeks, Mormon missionaries were led—and I repeat, were led—to our door. As a matter of fact, the Lord sent three missionaries to our door. I think he realized it was going to be a little tough. Furthermore, my wife informed me they all had the same first name—Elmer Jones, Elmer Cordingley, and Elmer Seastrand, which only goes to show that we should speak very clearly when we're proclaiming the gospel.

Everyone who has seen the excellent film-strip where President Kimball shows us how to be member missionaries knows that there are certain circumstances which facilitate friendship. We were a classic case of changed

circumstances bringing added receptivity to the gospel message. Not only had I just commenced my first civilian employment, but we had moved into a new home, and, to top it all, our second baby had just arrived.

Yes, many of our circumstances in life had changed, but, through the missionaries, God bless them, our whole outlook on life subsequently changed. We were taught the plan of salvation, God's plan for our eternal progression, God's plan to help us reach full development, which is true maturity. Our values changed, and therefore our standards of measurement changed as we realized the truthfulness of the message they taught. Our lives started to become fuller and more purposeful, to ripen and mature. That message I declare to you today in all solemnity and power. Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son of the Eternal Father, is our personal Savior and Redeemer. He has restored his church and gospel as was prophesied, and has once again spoken through prophets, beginning with the Prophet Joseph Smith, and he speaks today through our beloved Spencer W. Kimball, a true prophet of the Lord.

A friend who had seen the change in our lives, particularly with regard to the Word of Wisdom, said, "You will never get on in business if you don't smoke or drink." How wrong he was, for he went bankrupt, and I progressed. Our baptism was a veritable turning point, for the eyes of our understanding had been opened. For us, the business of being had really commenced, with the Holy Ghost, bestowed upon us following baptism, to help us and guide us and comfort us and teach us "the peaceable things of the kingdom" (D&C 36:2).

My first real assignment in industry was almost simultaneous with baptism. Some thought it was premature promotion for a junior trainee, but the windows of heaven were in reality opening up, and the promised blessings of tithing were pouring forth on our

humble little family (Malachi 3:10). I say *humble* advisedly because it was not easy to care for a family of four on a gross income equivalent to around one hundred dollars a month! How grateful we were, and are, for the principle of tithing, and what an easy principle to observe! We pay our tithing first, and then the Lord helps us to use our nine-tenths wisely. I can bear testimony of that.

We have never worried about worldly possessions. When we joined the Church we had no car, no telephone, no washing machine, refrigerator, or vacuum cleaner. We have always appreciated the Lord's admonition and promise:

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. [Matthew 6:33]

I can certainly testify to the reality of this promise, for the things which would help us do the Lord's work more effectively were added unto us.

The reverse is also true, for we went back to our first home after 25 years. Some of our old neighbors were still there, just the same; they had not progressed at all. They had rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ and were spiritually dead.

Parallels

I feel sure you would be interested to hear a little more about my first major assignment in industry. It was a fascinating one, which plunged me into the marvelous world of petrochemicals. I was given charge of the costs and statistics and administration services. Suddenly I was rubbing shoulders with chemists, engineers, and chemical engineers. I was soon using their technical language, drawing process flow charts, producing progress reports, and making thousands of calculations, estimates, and projections.

There were raw materials and by-products, catalysts and joint-products, yields and

efficiencies. It was a lot of work, but a lot of fun, for I enjoyed my work immensely. It was not just my vision of industry that was being widened, but my view of life. There are so many parallels between the industrial process and the business of being.

I soon discovered that petrochemicals were just the start of a whole series of interrelated processes, which on that particular industrial site covered 350 acres and employed approximately 10,000 people. It was fascinating to see the raw materials coming in through the factory gates, the trainloads of oil and truckloads of raw cellulose, and many other packages of every shape and size. After a while I would see vehicles leaving the factory laden with beautiful fabrics and useful plastics, and I wondered how this miracle had happened. The conclusion became obvious as I studied not only the industrial process but also the business of being. Conversion had taken place! I came to appreciate the industrial process which could make such marvelous transformations, so that rivers of oil and mountains of wood pulp could be converted into things to be worn and used every day.

What then of life? Is it not a process? Is it not the process of becoming? Do we not need to undergo changes, transformations, even conversions, to become what we need to become, what our Father expects and hopes we shall become?

Raw Materials

What are the raw materials our Eternal Father entrusted to us as we started our journey in mortality, as we commenced the process of becoming like him? First, our intelligence, "or, in other words, light and truth" within us (D&C 93:36); second, our spirit bodies, provided by him, for he is the very "Father of spirits" (Hebrews 12:9); third, our physical bodies, in which our spirits are tabernacled during our earthly sojourn; fourth, our inborn gifts and talents, for "every good gift cometh of Christ"

(Moroni 10:18); fifth, “An earth whereon (we) may dwell” (Abraham 3:24); and sixth, the time allotted, which we should “not idle away” (D&C 60:13).

The Process

The way we use, or rather convert, these precious raw materials is the very business of being. The Savior asked: “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). What is our Father’s business? Is it not “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man”? (Moses 1:39). This then must be maturity, the attainment of full development. However, the attainment of eternal life is a very long process. The Savior taught:

Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life. [Matthew 7:14]

The way leading to life, that is, eternal life, is not only strait and narrow, requiring discipline and obedience; it is also long, very long. The prophet Nephi emphasized this fact when he declared that, after entering on the straight and narrow path,

ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life [2 Nephi 31:20].

How great is the quality of endurance to the end!

Returning to our petrochemicals plant, the very first process was a “cracking” operation, where the oil was passed through intense furnace heat and cracked into various gas and oil components. As a young boy I was impressed, and still am, by the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who, being true to God and refusing to bow down to idols, were cast into the fiery furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar,

king of Babylon. The king was astonished when he beheld not three but four men walking in the midst of the fire without hurt, and declared: “and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (Daniel 3:25).

Are you able to withstand the heat of criticism, the pressures of temptation, the “fiery darts of the wicked”? (D&C 27:17). The Lord does not want us to crack, not even to have a crack in our armor of virtue. He wants us to come through unscathed, by having taken upon ourselves truth, righteousness, and faith, and then going forth and preaching the gospel of peace through the Spirit within us.

We shall do it, providing we build our foundations on the “rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God . . . a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Helaman 5:12).

I have asked a number of people the question, Would you sooner feel safe or unsafe? The answer has been, without exception, “I would sooner feel safe, of course.” Why is it, then, that so many of us behave as though we believe otherwise? If we do, or even think, something unclean or unworthy, we are not safe, for the Holy Ghost will withdraw. “The Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples” (Helaman 4:24).

My experience in petrochemicals gave me further food for thought, for out of the cracking process came heavier oils which were then refined into a whole range of useful products. For centuries, even millennia, the principle of refining has been a significant part of the industrial process, particularly with regard to precious metals. The Lord himself is like “a refiner’s fire” (Malachi 3:2), and, as we pattern ourselves on him, we shall have the dross, the waste, cast out. On this basis, may we ask ourselves the questions, Are we purer than we were a year ago, a month ago, a week ago? Have we overcome habits and traditions which have held us back from progressing?

In the business of being, it is not only the conversion process which is important, but also the efficiency of conversion. How effectively are we converting the God-given raw materials of which we have spoken? What has been the yield of product in our lives? For example, how much time have we wasted, how much talent is still undeveloped, and how much intellect has been ignored? Yes, brain and spirit, energy and talent, space and time, are all within our stewardship. Our beneficent Father has not provided these that we might misuse them, but that we might convert them into lives of example and service to others.

And whoso is found a faithful, a just, and a wise steward shall enter into the joy of his Lord, and shall inherit eternal life. [D&C 51:19]

Fellow students of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I commend you for your faithfulness, but I say to you, "Be even more faithful." I commend you for your achievements in many fields of activity and study, but I say to you, "Be even more diligent." I commend you for the spirituality you have developed and which you emanate and which I feel at this time, but I say to you, "Be even more spiritual."

I pray, in the words of the apostle Paul, that my speech and my preaching have not been

with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. [1 Corinthians 2:4-5]

I further pray that the "Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent [may have] wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2), this having been the transforming effect of King Benjamin's address.

A Parable

In closing, I would like to give you a parable. There was a certain man who, desiring to enjoy the beauties of nature, betook himself for a woodland stroll by the side of a clear, flowing river. As he contemplated the magnificence of God's handiwork, he neglected to observe the uneven path where tree roots straggled down to the water's edge. He stumbled and fell headlong into the river. The water was deeper than he had thought, and he could not swim! He cried out, but who would hear, as the water engulfed him in darkness? He surfaced and tried to shout again, his hopes bedimmed, and a second time he sank. His call was weaker as he rose for the last time, and who would hear him now? But someone else was walking nearby and heard the man's cries, dived in, saved him, and brought him safely to the bank. When the man recovered, he looked up into the face of the one who had saved him and said, "Oh, thank you, thank you for saving me. What can I do to show my love and appreciation?"

The one who had saved him smiled and said: "There are many things you can do for me," and then he taught him lovingly and carefully. Then a sad thing happened. Although the man who had been saved lived, the man who saved him died as a result of the experience. Despite his sorrow, the one saved had a warm feeling within him, for he knew what to do to show his love and gratitude for his savior.

So it is with us, for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, died that we might live. We know what we should do, for he has told us: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Affirmation

There is nothing more precious to me than my testimony of Jesus Christ. I have a witness that he is my Savior and Redeemer, the Son of the Almighty God; Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of the Eternal Father. I know

how Heavenly Father so loved us, so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life.

I am grateful for the missionaries who traveled 6,000 miles to share the gospel with our little family. I am grateful for the love of my Heavenly Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, and all those who follow him who have helped me in the business of being. I know that Jesus Christ lives today. I have a witness of the risen Lord; I know that he lives and that he leads this, his church, the only true and living church

in all the world. And I know that our Savior speaks to us, as he did anciently, through prophets, through the prophet Spencer W. Kimball today, a mighty man of God, a true prophet of the Lord.

May the full blessings of the Lord be with you in your studies and in your personal lives, in your challenges and in your decision making, in your maturing and in the very business of being, which is to grow “unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.