

Our Spiritual Heritage

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I prepared a talk for you which I discarded this morning. You'll have to judge later as to whether I did the right thing. A comment that was made to me by a student here a few weeks ago caused me to reflect and think about something that perhaps I could talk about, and so I'll try to go in that direction and hope for the Spirit of the Lord to guide and inspire me so that I might say the right thing.

Reflections on My Own Life

I'd like to reflect a little about my own life. I was born and raised in Tooele. There are a few other General Authorities who have some relationship to Tooele. J. Reuben Clark was born and raised in Grantsville, which is about seven miles from Tooele. We really don't claim each other, but it's close enough so that the competition is strong. LeGrand Richards spent a number of his early years in Tooele. His father, as I recall, was a counselor in the stake presidency there before he was called into the Quorum of the Twelve. I like to talk to LeGrand Richards because he knew my grandfather and my grandmother, and I never had the opportunity of being acquainted with either of them. He recalls for me from time to time some experiences of my own heritage.

I would like to spend a few minutes talking about my own upbringing and some of the experiences I had in my hometown of Tooele. Some people say, and I think erroneously, that the blessings of the gospel and the inspiration and direction of the Spirit as they existed at the time of the restoration of the gospel are not among us today as much as they were at an earlier time. It has been my experience that, as the Church grows bigger, the blessings of the gospel and spiritual experiences are as available to us now as they ever were.

My Father and His Mother's Experience

My father was called as stake president when I was fairly young. In those days they were not called as stake president for only a few years. He served for twenty years as president of the Tooele Stake. He was called when I was six and released when I was twenty-six. He had some great experiences associated with

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that service. I think it was Joseph F. Merrill who called him. Brother Merrill was a member of the Quorum of Twelve. He told of going down the list of priesthood leaders in the stake and coming to the name of my father and feeling, as it were, an electric shock. This was before he had met him. Later, in telling this experience, he said he also heard a voice that indicated to him that this was the person who should be called as president of the Tooele Stake. He extended the call to him, and my father became the president of the Tooele Stake.

The whole story becomes, to our family anyway, a little more significant when we reflect on the fact that, before my father was born, his mother passed away. She told in her diary and to her children of passing through the veil and being met by her loved ones and family and having them tell her that it was not time for her to come there yet. They said she needed to bring another child into the world, a child who would play a significant role in the building of the kingdom. In this way she would fill the measure of her probation. She tells some interesting things associated with this experience. She was given the opportunity, of course, to come back. She was told that, if she did come back, she would not be without pain. She told of how peaceful it was to cross beyond the veil, how pleasant and peaceful an experience it was. On the other hand, she said that it was painful to come back. I've often reflected upon that. You know, sometimes we're prone, because of our love and anxiety for people, to anguish over them and maybe try to intercede on their behalf as they hover between life and death. How wise it is for us to allow the Lord to accomplish for a person what He will accomplish rather than ask that our loved one may be kept on or held in mortality. I know in some cases we keep them on in pain rather than allowing them to go in peace.

She also said that there were people a short distance from her who couldn't come to her,

and she couldn't go to them. She recognized them from her native Scotland. They called to her when they knew that she was going to return from beyond the veil. "When you go back, please, please have someone do our work for us," they said. "Have someone do our temple work for us." Sometimes I think we look upon the programs of the church as duties that just keep us busy. We don't always realize that they are indeed a part of eternity, that specific things bring blessings to specific people, and that it is important for us to be involved in the work of the gospel. Very important.

Well, she came back, and my father came into the world (an event for which I am grateful), and my father fulfilled his destiny, to a large extent, when a member of the Twelve who did not know him received the specific prompting to call him as a stake president. I learn from that experience that, although we look on the face of things and we look on the faces of people, we don't always understand that a calling in this Church, no matter to whom or where it comes or where the person is to serve, is fundamentally and basically a divine matter. "We believe a man must be called of God, by prophecy" (Articles of Faith 1:5). We believe that this is the gospel of Jesus Christ and that the Savior directs His own Church. The reality of the divine nature of a person's call is very significant to me because of some of these experiences.

Robbie Shields Was Faithful

Let me tell you another experience about a friend of mine. His name was Robbie Shields. He'll never go down in the annals of history as one of the great men of the world—only a few people knew him in the Church. The thing that Robbie Shields had going for him was that the Lord loved him. Robbie Shields lived next door to me in his later life. As my brother and I were growing up, first he was my brother's senior home-teaching companion, and then he was mine, always faithful, always there, always

with a word of prayer before we went out, always taking care of the duties of a home teacher with faithfulness and loyalty, always helping us to do our job as Aaronic Priesthood bearers and home teachers.

I can remember sitting in the Tooele First Ward on many occasions on fast Sunday and listening to Robbie, who would always sit on the north side halfway back, tell of the experience of how the Lord spoke to him. In his younger days he was teaching a Sunday School class, and they were looking for an answer to one of their questions. He prayed and searched and read and prayed and searched and read.

One day he was out hauling hay in Pine Canyon. He was by himself forking the hay onto the wagon when a voice spoke to him calling him by name.

He said to the voice, "Who are you?" and the voice said, "I am the Lord."

Robbie Shields said, "Why can't I see you?"

The voice said, "Because you don't have to." That was absolutely true for Brother Shields. Robbie Shields had the faith and testimony to keep him true whether he heard the Lord's voice or not. The Lord gave him the answer to the question he had as a Sunday School teacher. I heard, as many of us did, Brother Shields giving that testimony many times.

It taught me a number of lessons in my young life. One is that the Lord does speak to us. Sometimes He speaks to us the way that He spoke to Robbie Shields. More often than not He speaks to us the way He spoke to Enos, that is, He speaks to our mind and to our heart, but He does speak to us. It taught me another lesson in my young life, and that is that He doesn't usually speak to us in the classroom. I know He can speak to us anyplace. He wishes, but usually He doesn't speak to us in the classroom. He doesn't always immediately speak to us when we contemplate and study and look at a question. Maybe that's part of the preparation. I think of the Prophet Joseph Smith, who read

that passage in James, chapter 1, verse 5. Yet the Restoration didn't start then. The Restoration began when Joseph was in the grove, when he was on his knees, and when the Father and the Son appeared to him.

The Lord didn't speak to Robbie Shields in the classroom. He spoke to him as he was out in the world performing his every day duties, carrying on his individual activities, doing that which was expected of him, earning his living, keeping the commandments. I have come to know that, if the Lord is going to speak to us, that is quite often how it happens.

"If Any Man Will Do His Will . . ."

The Sanhedrin took great delight in counseling together and rejecting the simple and plain principles and teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They sat together and theorized; they discussed one with another how wrong the teachings of the Savior were. Although their own scriptures predicted that He would come, they rejected Him because they stood with their traditions rather than with the word of God. This is the reason the Savior finally said to them and to His followers, on two occasions, "If any man will do his will" (John 7:17), if any man will do this, if any man will actually go out and apply these principles, he will know whether I speak of myself or whether this comes from God. On another occasion he said, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). He said, "You don't gather figs from thorns" (see Matthew 7:16). If any man will do the will of my Father, he will know. And then he went on to talk about the person who built his foundation on the firm, hard ground as compared to the person who built his house on the sand. When the winds of adversity and change came, they blew the house of sand away while the person who built upon the foundation of rock stood steady. The person who builds his faith by the process of living the commandments and building his testimony is on firm ground. The person who

finds himself out in the field doing his duty is usually better off than the person who stands and theorizes and debates what is right and what is wrong.

And so it is with us. The lesson I learned from Robbie Shields was that the Lord usually speaks to us out in the field when we're about our business and when we're about our Father's business. Not a whole lot of revelation comes until we've applied the things that we've been taught in our lives.

Bishops Anderson and Barrus

I'd like to tell you another story about my growing up in Tooele. Bevan Anderson at the time was bishop of the Tooele Fifth Ward. Brother Anderson is a stalwart in the town, a faithful soul. When my father was stake president, he called Brother Anderson as a young bishop. Shortly after he was called, my father had the overwhelming feeling that he should release him. He couldn't understand this because you don't call bishops and then suddenly release them. But he had this terrible feeling that Bishop Anderson should be released, even though he was worthy, strong, and faithful, and as good a bishop as you'll find anyplace. But still there came the feeling that he should be released. My father fought this feeling; he didn't want to release him. As time went on, finally, Bevan Anderson came to him and said, "For some reason, I feel I should be released." And he was then released as bishop.

Called to take his place was O. T. Barrus. You've got to understand a little about Bishop Barrus's background. Going way back, he had a heritage of faithfulness in the Church. But, in recent years Brother Barrus had not been as active in the Church as he should have been. He was a good man, but the world had gotten in the way a little bit, and he wasn't active. The Barruses had a son by the name of Dean Barrus. Dean was one of those persons who was all-everything. In everything he did, he

was outstanding. He wasn't cocky or proud. He was a humble, nice person that everybody loved. He played basketball well, he played football well, he was governor at Boys' State. In everything he touched, he was a leader. He was one of those special souls the Lord sends from heaven every once in a while.

About this same time World War II broke out, and young Dean Barrus found himself on Navy duty. As fate would have it, the ship he was on was sunk by a submarine and his life was taken. My father tells of a very sacred and personal experience after the release of Bishop Anderson. He said, "I was given to know that in the heavens young Dean Barrus, because his life was taken so early, was given the opportunity to have fulfilled a desire he had for his family." It was Dean Barrus's desire that his father might be called as bishop, that through this action, he might be drawn into Church activity and through this be put in a position where he could use his talents to serve other people in the kingdom. So it was, without anybody's being able to explain it, Bevan Anderson was released with a good feeling and the realization that is what the Lord wanted, and O. T. Barrus was called as bishop and later as stake president—a strong and faithful member of the Church and a person who did much good before the Lord called him home.

This sequence of events taught me some very significant lessons about a person's call and about a person's release. It also taught me something as a priesthood leader because there have been occasions in my own leadership duties when I felt that someone probably should be released. You see, a release is as providential as a call so it's no punishment. We serve because we're called, and we're released because we're called. I have on occasion felt the inspiration of the Spirit indicating that someone should be released at a particular time. I have fought it on the basis that I couldn't find any outward justification for it. I've said to

myself, "Well, I can't recommend that to the brethren around me because I can't justify it." And then this experience has returned to my mind, and I've come to realize that it is indeed my responsibility to pass it on to those of my brethren who would make the final decision on these matters and who have the broader light or understanding; that if the Lord prompts me to act this way, then I have a responsibility to send it forward. For who knows under what circumstances a person might be released or a person might be called? Who knows the extent of the meaning of a man's release or a man's call?

Raising Boys, Not Cows

There is a little farm on the edge of Tooele where my father was born. My Aunt Jessie still lives there. She's in her nineties now, and she has so many grandchildren and great grandchildren that none of us can count them, but she knows them all. She's a remarkable person. It was on this farm, when we were teenagers, that my father decided my brother and I needed to learn how to work. He was running the newspaper in town and being president of a stake that covered a hundred square miles. He was pretty busy, but he had my brother and me working on that farm. We were in the 4-H program, and a bunch of the fathers of the boys in the 4-H program bought some purebred, registered Guernseys from the Northwest and brought them down, and we all got a cow. I should say my brother got a cow, and, since I was his little brother, it was mine by association. I don't know how many of you have had experience with cows, but our cow had heifer after heifer after heifer, and, when you get a heifer, you end up with another cow; and, when you end up with another cow, that's one more cow to milk. It was not very long until we were sort of in the business. We had a number of cows that we were milking, and it was quite an experience. We built a little reservoir on the farm so that we wouldn't have to get up at

three o'clock in the morning to take the water. We could run the water in the reservoir and use it as we needed it.

We had some great experiences on the farm, my teenage brother and I, unsupervised. I think he was more steady than I was. We had some fruit trees and a lot of lucern, a lot of hay. We grew some corn; we grew a little wheat. We had a number of things on that farm. We weren't the best farmers in the world. We were doing the best we could, but we were not the best farmers. We were surrounded by other farms, and those farms were being farmed by people who knew what they were doing. One day one of the neighbors came to my father. He was a farmer, and he had a whole list of the things that my brother and I were doing wrong. I think I could have added more things to that list than he had. Anyway, he went down the list as he was talking to my father, and my father sat back and then he said, "Jim, you don't understand. You see, I'm raising boys, not cows." And Jim, a few years later after my father passed away, shared that experience with me. In looking back I was grateful for the fact that indeed my father decided that he was going to raise boys and not cows, and he did. That's become a very important lesson to me as a father. You know, when you raise boys and girls instead of cows, it doesn't make a whole lot of difference how much time you spend. I guess in one respect you can never spend enough time with your children. In another respect, if you don't have all the time in the world, it's where your priorities are that counts. It's whether your children know that they're first in your life, no matter what you're doing. The lesson of raising boys and girls instead of cows, for which I was personally grateful, has never left me. As a father and as a husband, it has helped me.

The Carpenter Who Changed His Way

I'd like to tell you another experience about a carpenter my father used to hire. He

was a very fine man, a very sharp and astute individual. He collected quotations. I still have two or three of the books that he pulled together on the sayings of the Brethren on different subjects. He was a tremendous gospel scholar. This man not only served a good mission, but he had gained to a tremendous extent and ability in gospel scholarship. He knew the scriptures; he knew the gospel. He would go to Sunday School class and priesthood class, and he would disrupt everything because he was constantly correcting the teachers on the little issues or bringing up gospel dimensions of which the teachers were not aware. When he would get in a sort of cross fire with the teachers, he would usually win; he was usually right. It was not only frustrating to the teachers; it was disruptive to the class.

This friend of ours changed his way one day. He shared with us what happened to him. He said, "I suppose you could say that I had a revelation. For one thing, I heard heavenly choirs. Never in my entire life had I heard music like that. Oh, how I want to be there! It was a beautiful experience." Then he said, "Someone talked to me and scolded me. I was told that I must not disrupt the Sunday School and priesthood classes. 'You must not do it because you bring contention and that brings the spirit of the devil. You must not do it.'" So he became cooperative and helpful in his classes from that time forward. The lesson I learned from that is that a man who uses his knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ to contend, to demonstrate that he knows a bit more than someone else, a man who feeds controversy by virtue of his background or his understanding of an issue, is a man who will introduce the spirit of the adversary into a gathering where the Spirit of the Lord is expected to be. It not only damages him, but it damages the faith and the testimony of the people around him long, long after the issues are forgotten. I have a feeling that long after the issues and differences of opinion have been

forgotten, we will be judged by how well we upheld the priesthood and how faithful we were at bringing harmony and the Spirit of the Lord into the meetings and classes that involved us: controversy in the Church setting invites the adversary and this always diminishes the spirit of light and truth.

Over the years I've remembered the experience of the carpenter, and I've seen that upholding the priesthood is greater, far greater, in working out our own individual salvation than any point of controversy or doctrine that we could make that causes contention and brings feelings of contrariness. Those kinds of things cause the influence of the adversary to affect a person's heart, and they are not according to the will and inspiration of the Lord. It's better that we keep the spirit of controversy out of our discussions, out of our teaching, than to feel that we are enlightening people when in reality all we're doing is destroying the faith and testimony of those who may not be as well founded as we are. In the final analysis our ability to be a peacemaker and be loyal to the priesthood might be the basic issues upon which we earn our salvation. It might be that they are far more important than the little nitty-gritty issues and tenets that come and go and will eventually be forgotten.

I believe that, as teachers and members of the Church, and as children of our Father in Heaven, we need to remember the lesson that my friend the carpenter learned when somebody spoke to him from the heavens and told him not to be so controversial because it introduced a spirit that was from the adversary. While it might not have affected him too much, it affected those who were listening and caused him to be in a position where he was not a builder, where he was not an example of the believer.

I'd like to finish by reading from 3 Nephi, chapter 22, verse 17. This is a chapter that talks about the last days; it talks about Zion; it talks about stakes. It is comparable to chapter 54 of

Isaiah. It says, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." And I like to think that it is directed not only to the Church, but to the members of the Church who will keep the faith and build their testimonies and live by the commandments the Lord has given them, who will in every sense of the word take upon them the name of Christ. Although that act is entered into at the time of baptism, the reality of it doesn't come until we begin to understand whether our everyday lives are in harmony with what we indeed said we would do and how we would act as far as the gospel of Christ is concerned.

No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord. [Isaiah 54:17; 3 Nephi 22:17]

Now, I've talked today about my heritage and about the heritage of my community. It's not so different from your heritage because, when we embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have a common heritage. It is a doctrinal heritage; it is a spiritual heritage, and what is shared by one is shared by all. We are all a party to the Father and the Son's appearing to the Prophet Joseph Smith. We are all a party to Brigham Young's standing and supporting and sustaining the Prophet Joseph Smith through some terribly difficult times. We are all a party to the heritage of the gospel, the spiritual

heritage of the gospel, the blessings of the gospel, the blessings that are promised to those who believe in the kingdom of God.

Have they stopped since Joseph Smith and Brigham Young and Wilford Woodruff? I submit to you that they are here today in their fullness, and I say to you that the Lord speaks to you and me. The fact that he speaks is not unusual, but it does little good unless we are listening, unless we reach back into our common heritage, unless we keep the commandments. The promptings of the Holy Spirit need to become a part of our lives so we're willing to accept them and be inspired by them and live by them.

This is our common heritage. May the Lord bless us that no controversy, no doctrines as taught by the principles of men, no personal disagreement, no unrepented sin will become so big and so powerful that it will take away from us our spiritual heritage. May our spiritual heritage last long after issues are forgotten and men are dead. May the Lord bless us to this end. I bear you my witness that the work is true. I testify to you that I know that God lives. I know He lives; I know that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, the Author of this work. I know that Joseph Smith saw what he said he saw. I know Spencer W. Kimball is a prophet of God today. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ; this is His holy work; this is His way. May the Lord bless us that we may honor our heritage and stand firm for that which is true, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.