

# *Put on Your Spiritual Clothes*

PAUL H. DUNN

What a wonderful sight you are, my beloved young brothers and sisters. It was just last week I saw about this many assembled in a department store where I was trying to get a Christmas present gift wrapped.

I'm thrilled to be here. I hope without offending I can say in all sincerity you're a very favorite audience of mine. I feel of your spirit, I can identify with your greatness, and I'm always pleased to be included here.

On behalf of the Church, the Board of Education, the Board of Trustees, Latter-day Saints everywhere, I would like to congratulate this marvelous football team on their accomplishments this year. To you, Coach Tuckett, Coach Edwards, all of the coaches, players—we congratulate you. I have an opportunity, as one of your representatives, to meet with many non-Latter-day Saints throughout the world. Even while this team was finalizing many of its accomplishments, I was in Europe, and your fame had preceded you. What a thrill it is for one in my station to be able to identify with a school that, while it has a great football reputation, stands even higher in its moral and spiritual values. So while we honor you, I pay equal honor to this great student body, which is rare and unique indeed. I salute all of you, for it's a great pride to be associated with you.

## **The Spirit of Christmas**

Now, I appreciate the spirit of Christmas in the air. I'm a little boy at heart. I love the feeling, the goodwill that seems to emanate. I had an interesting experience this last weekend. I had an opportunity to be in a stake conference down in President Kimball's home country in Arizona. One of the things I like to do each Sunday morning before going in with the parents in the general session of conference is to visit in the Junior Sunday School. The children are exciting and refreshing and challenging, as you know. It perks up their spirits to think that the General Authorities know they exist, and I like to involve them where I can. I was doing just that this past Sunday and, knowing that President Kimball had come from their area, I thought I'd try to set the stage by asking some simple questions. I said, "Can any person in this Sunday School this morning tell me what person who is very special to all of us comes from this community?" One little fellow, about four, shot his hand up. I said, "Tell us, young

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man, who comes from this area that's very special and lives in Salt Lake?" He said, "Santa." Well, I knew where his mind was, and it prompted me at this time to brush up on some interesting comments from other young people—all very real, perhaps not members of our faith, who each year write real letters to Santa Claus. The post office receives thousands of these every year. Here's a little collection of these letters. Think about them now, the refreshment of youth:

*Dear Santa Claus, how can you tell who are the good children and who are the bad? Please tell me as quick as you can.*

*Dear Saint Nick, could you send me a snorkel and some flippers? I'm learning to be a deep-sea diver in the bathtub.*

*Dear Santa Claus, I love Christmas because at Christmas there is pretty white snow, and everybody is nice to everybody, even grownups.*

*Hi Santa! Could you leave a nice doll for my sister so she will have something to play with? My mother always makes me play with her.*

*Dear Santa, can you give a pretty present to my teacher, Miss Lewis, and tell her it came from me, Jeffrey? I think it would help a lot.*

*Dear Santa Claus, I think you should leave a big present for my grandma. She knew you when you were a kid.*

*Hello, Santa Claus, I wrote to you last Christmas that I wanted a surprise, and you left me a book. I don't want any more surprises.*

Well, they're refreshing, to be sure—honest and sincere at heart.

I hope, particularly on this date, our minds are remembering another great occasion. Most of you are obviously too tender to recall

personally, but historically I'm sure you can identify with December 7, 1941. I was just a little younger than most of you on that fateful Sunday morning, little realizing that that event would involve me personally. Without walking you through all the details, several months later I found myself fulfilling General MacArthur's commission that he would return. I went in two days ahead of him. Several weeks later, near this very date, on the island of Leyte, I learned a great lesson as a young Latter-day Saint in combat. I belonged to the seventy-seventh infantry division. At the time, we were fighting General Yamashita, who was the General MacArthur of the Japanese infantry. Theirs was a crack outfit. We had just taken the Valencia airport and secured it on the island of Leyte, about two days before Christmas 1944. In making preparation for the final assault on a rather large mountain near the airport, we were commissioned to dig in our foxhole at the base of the hill. There were about one thousand of us in our particular garrison. We did not know it at the time, but the enemy, holding the top of the ridge, numbered approximately three thousand. Whenever you take the offensive in combat, just as in football, you need a little greater power. But we didn't have that intelligence at our disposal at the time.

In that situation my heart and my mind naturally drifted back home. I was a nineteen-year-old boy at the time, and Christmas had always been very special in our home. So I was naturally thinking of mom and dad and my brothers and my girlfriend and what they would be doing on that special occasion. As Christmas Eve approached, a slight drizzly rain set in on the mountainside. It was cold and shivery for those of us who knew better circumstances, but dug in we did. I was even bold enough to keep a family tradition going. A 37 antitank gun was located near my foxhole position, and I hung my stocking on the muzzle and settled in for the night. The rain continued.

It turned to bitter cold, high in the mountains. We knew, because of the characteristic of the enemy, that about midnight they would invade our lines. They would often send in suicide squads to weaken our front and then follow with infantry attacks. And so we were preparing for the inevitable. About eleven o'clock that evening, Christmas Eve 1944, out of nowhere on the side of the mountain a young tenor, whom I had never met before and still haven't, from somewhere on our infantry line in a beautiful voice sang a solo: "It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old."

By the time he got to the second verse, one thousand American soldiers had joined him. Why, you would have thought these hard-crusted old infantrymen were the Mormon Tabernacle Choir! He next sang "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," "O Come, All Ye Faithful," and a great medley of songs that are very dear to us. Then he concluded with "Silent Night, Holy Night." We all joined in chorus with him. I guess, because of the circumstances, I haven't been touched quite like that before or since.

Twelve o'clock came, and the enemy didn't come. For the first time in my combat experience, they had not acted according to schedule. One o'clock, two o'clock, and all night we sat ready with our weapons. But the enemy still didn't come. The next morning, as Christmas dawn broke, we very carefully came out of our foxholes, gave each other an exchange of greetings, talked about home, girls, the things that mattered most. The day passed. We had an interesting Christmas dinner, as you can in a front-line situation, and then on into Christmas night. Finally, about five minutes to twelve, as Christmas was fading into another day, the first enemy mortar crossed our lines, and World War II had commenced again. But for twenty-four hours I was a personal witness that peace on earth, goodwill toward men, can actually occur when people are touched by a true spirit.

### **The Gospel Spreading Throughout the World**

I couldn't help but think, as I watched this marvel unfold before me, if a simple Christmas carol will do that between a Christian and a non-Christian nation, what will the gospel of Jesus Christ do for people everywhere? If only you and I, imbued with that same sweet spirit and testimony, could go forth (as President Kimball has challenged us to do) to touch the hearts and minds of people in all nations. Well, I think we already know what would follow. We're seeing it happen: the greatness of the gospel in transforming the lives of people. I think that's significant, particularly at this time of the year.

Now, I guess I'm as Santa Claus-oriented as anybody, and I think it's a great tradition, although I hope and pray that it never overshadows the true purpose and meaning of why we celebrate this time of the year. While we know it's not the exact birthdate, it's a date that we've set apart to commemorate the birth, and I think even more particularly the mission, of our Lord and Savior. People everywhere I find, like you, really want to know the gospel. They don't know how to find it occasionally, or they are a little confused sometimes when it is presented. Maybe they don't quite relate to it, but you and I have this tremendous opportunity to share. I see it as a part of your great educational process here, learning sufficiently the gospel along with your other disciplines so that you might, in your own wonderful way, transform people everywhere throughout the world. I give you that challenge again on this occasion.

Some time ago I wrote a book, and I appreciate that what the world does not need is another book. But I like to write because it forces me to think. (My schoolteachers could tell you that I was not much of a thinker.) I've thought of some of the passing records I made when I was in high school. The greatest passing record I hold was getting *out* of high school, and I think that still stands. But be as

it may, the important thing as we get our education is to keep that spiritual balance so that we might do the things the Lord has basically asked us to do.

One of the books I have written is on the Osmond family. Now, I'm not here to debate whether you think they're great or not. (I have a personal opinion about it, obviously.) They're tremendous missionaries. I just came back from England, and they're the most popular singing group in all the United Kingdom. They're the most popular in France, they're the most popular in Scandinavia, they're the most popular in the Orient, and they're not too far from the top in the United States. They're opening doors no other Latter-day Saints could through a medium that, while some may have a question or two, is softening and touching many hearts. I thought their true story should be told from a personal point of view, and I wrote the book as a missionary tool.

This book is having an interesting reaction. Many hundreds of letters from non-Latter-day Saints come to me each month in response to it. Quite a few, of course, are from the teenage level, but surprisingly many of the letters are from those in their mature years, grandmothers and grandfathers who identify with a great family who are doing so much for so many. Would you like to hear a typical letter from an Osmond fan not of this Church? One came from Tokyo the other day. (Keep in mind that the writer, twelve years old, is not a Christian.)

*Dear Mr. Dunn:*

*Thank you for writing the book on the Osmonds. They're my favorite people. I understand you're a General Authority for your church and therefore you work with a prophet. I would like to know about prophets. Would you please write me back as quick as you can?*

One comes from a young girl in England:

*Dear Mr. Dunn:*

*Thank you for writing the book on the Osmonds. They are wonderful people. They've touched my heart very much. I understand in your position that you must know God. I would like to know God, too. Would you write me soon and tell me how I can get to know him?*

Oh, I get lots of P.S.'s—particularly from the female audience: "I dreamed last night I married Donny. Do you think you could arrange it?"

Young people, older people all over the world are seeking what you and I have to give. Now, I often think as I read those letters that hopefully you and I are prepared in our own right, first as parents, next as members and leaders of the Church, to give honestly the answers that people seek. That's one of the great purposes I see in this marvelous University, to prepare us academically, but also spiritually. It's that spiritual realm that concerns us the most, as you well know. I've often wondered what kind of parents these young people have. I could make some guesses. These youth are seeking to know, not knowing where to find.

### **Jesus' Parable About Spiritual Preparation**

I couldn't help but think at this Christmastime of a great parable that Jesus taught many years ago. You know, one of the exciting things about religion is that it solves all problems. There isn't a question you have academically, personally, financially, or otherwise but what the Lord has given you an answer through a prophet. The question, I guess, is do you know where to find the answers to your problems? When you do, you resolve the challenges in your life accordingly.

Jesus was asked a certain question about God many times. It is perhaps one of the greatest single questions asked in the New Testament times, and I'm sure he also

answered it while visiting this continent. The question is “What is the kingdom of God like? What is it like to be with God?” Jesus, in Matthew, gave the answer, and it’s fitting for this particular audience in time of preparation.

Let me first set the stage for you. Matthew, of course, is a great teacher. He draws frequently upon the great parables to convey a heavenly principle in an earthly way that the people can understand. A multitude has gathered. The classroom for the Savior, in most cases, was by the seashore, the mountainside, in the village. He was asked, “What is it like to be with God? What is the kingdom of God like?” “And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven [the dwelling place; in modern vernacular, the celestial kingdom] is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son” (Matthew 22:1–2). People in Palestine understood kingdoms, because that’s what they were part of. Today, he might have used the words *democracy*, or *governments*, or *Congress*, or *president*. King they understood. When I was in England, a couple of weeks ago, I found the people there understand royalty, and it’s very easy for them to identify with this parable. The king represents the highest authority. The king made a marriage for his son.

Keep in mind that in the time of Jesus, as it is today, a marriage is perhaps the single greatest event. He’s saying to his multitude, “Think of the greatest, most important event that can happen in your life. That’s what it’s going to be like to be with God in his dwelling place.” (I can identify with some of this because I’ve married off two daughters.) Weddings in those days lasted a little longer than they do today. It wasn’t uncommon for them to go three, four, five, six, seven days. Can you imagine standing in a reception line in a tuxedo three days? I can’t. My wife couldn’t even keep her shoes on for two hours. But the people in Jesus’ time went about this in great celebration.

Could I just confide in you for a minute? I’m a very practical person, or at least I try to be. We sat down with both of our daughters at the time of their marriages, and we talked about cost and image. You know, the things that you’re trying to do you do because you want to do right by your children, but not to overdo it. We finally settled on a caterer that would cost dad fifty-two cents per head. As the guests would come through the line, they’d take those dainty little cups, cakes, and juice—at fifty-two cents per head. I think everybody in Salt Lake City got in that line. You know, I think some people just saw the line and got in it to see who was at the end of it. Well, I could handle it for about two hours, but at the end of the third hour I was becoming frantic. You know, I was doing this, “Hello, Tom, Bill, Jim, thanks for coming.” Then I was thinking, “There’s 52¢, \$1.04. . . .” So I can identify with the practical side of a marriage celebration.

Jesus was saying, “Think of the greatest event that can happen in your life. That’s what it’s going to be like to be with God.” Continuing the parable, Jesus said, “And then the king sent forth his servants to invite the guests.” There was no printing press in those days, and so they had to send invitations out by word of mouth.

Have you noticed the color and variety of announcements we have these days? I got an announcement the other day from one of my former missionaries. He was clever. His announcement had a picture of the couple on one side, and the words inviting you to the reception on the other. The picture showed the bride chasing him around a tree. I knew the elder, and I appreciated that picture, but there was no printing press in Jesus’ day. They sent out invitations by word of mouth.

They were all invited to the great palace, and you can imagine what kind of festive affair it was. “And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment” (Matthew 22:11). In those

days, when you went to a festive occasion, particularly a wedding, you got dressed up and you went properly dressed. What the king said to this man, I think, is one of the great, great lines in scripture. Don't tell me the Savior doesn't have a sense of humor. Watch this one: "Friend, How camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?" (Matthew 22:12). Look, the guy shows up at the palace dressed in his levis. I mean, he's got his Saturday grubs on, and he's standing there in front of royalty. The king says, "Friend, how come you came to my palace, this great reception, in your levis?" (That's not a modern translation. I'm just interpreting it for you.) Now notice the next line. It's terrific. "And the man was speechless." You got the picture? Can you see him standing there without a word, thinking, "Well, you got me there, king"?

Could I make a modern analogy for you? If I invited you up (this would be great and I'm sure both sides would appreciate it if we could work it out, but I don't know how we could mechanically) to see President Kimball for a special interview, I think you wouldn't need to have me tell you, "Put on a tie or a Sunday dress." I think you'd just do that. You dress up automatically for certain occasions, don't you? But there are some people who might be a little dense, who wouldn't get the message.

The parable continues, "Then said the king to his servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness" (Matthew 22:13). Boy, what a penalty for wearing levis!

Well, what does all that mean in plain old Brigham Young University language? The king is our Heavenly Father; wedding guests, you and me coming back into his presence; wedding garment, getting spiritually prepared to meet God. The time of mortality is the place to prepare, which is an eternal gospel principle. Can you imagine if you and I did not prepare, not only academically but spiritually, and we

reported back home improperly dressed? Can you get an idea of how you might feel, standing in the presence of God, not being spiritually dressed? I think we'd be speechless. Now that's not a threat; it's a basic law of the gospel.

### **Spiritual Preparation Through the Scriptures**

You young people, of all people in the world, know that basically there are only two things you can take with you out of this world. Think about it a minute. (I thought for a long time that I'd take my ball glove, but some teacher told me I couldn't.) There are certain physical possessions I like, but I can't take them. Only two things will I take with me when I depart. You see if I'm not correct. One is my character, which would include in a Mormon setting my intelligence. The other is my personal relationships with my friends and my family. That's it.

Now let me ask you a very honest question: Why is it you and I spend most of our time accumulating things we can't take, at the expense of the things we can? Why do we do that in this world? That's the problem in the world today. And the Lord is saying to us that the time will come when we will have that opportunity to stand in his presence. Hopefully, we will be spiritually dressed for the occasion.

Now, as I look at you at Brigham Young University, you're preparing to get dressed for the greatest event that will ever occur in your lives. I thank God every day for great men and women like these, for great leaders who do so much to help us know how to put our spiritual clothes on. I thank God for it. The scriptures, then, become the process of learning how to get dressed. You know what the challenge is from President Kimball to learn the scriptures. All the General Authorities for the last six months have had a challenge to try to teach this more emphatically to members all over the world.

I ran across a little verse that I think is significant:

*Old Brother Higgins built a shelf  
For the old family Bible to rest itself,  
Lest a sticky finger or a grimy thumb  
Might injure the delicate pages some.  
He cautioned his children to touch it not,  
And it rests there with never a blot,  
Though the Higgins tribe were a troublesome lot.*

*His neighbor, Miggins, built a shelf.  
"Come, children," he said, "and help yourself."  
Now his book is old and ragged and worn,  
With some of the choicest pages torn,  
Where children have fingered, and thumbed, and  
read,  
But of the Miggins children I've heard it said,  
That each carries a Bible in his head.*

I would hope and pray, my young brothers and sisters, in this great moment of your life as you obtain knowledge, of the world, that you will place above it all the holy, sacred scriptures and the counsel from prophets that will assist you in becoming better dressed in the Spirit.

I love you and I sustain you. I bear witness that these things are true. I pray at this Christmas season—as we sing our carols, as we exchange our gifts, as we share mutual admiration, feelings of love and affection—that above all else, you and I with our faith and testimony, like the lonely twenty-year-old soldier on the island of Leyte, will transform the lives of millions. Can you imagine, if one tenor on a battleline could stop a war for twenty-four hours, what twenty-five thousand Latter-day Saints turned loose on a sick world could do with your knowledge and your testimony? Now I challenge you to go do it.

For heaven's sake, have a little enjoyment when you do it. You know, if I have one personal concern as I travel the Church, it's occasionally when I run into a long-faced Mormon. He worries me. You know, if this Church is really true, and I testify it is, you and I ought to be the happiest people in the world. We ought to just *bounce* through life, hardly waiting to share it. That's the challenge I give to you.

Did I ever tell you the counsel my dad gave me? My dad told me one time, "Paul, will you remember that life is a journey, not a camp? And when you grow up, if you're not careful, you're going to be very disappointed because too many Mormons are camping." And then with that clenched fist he said, "*You break camp and move now.*" I've been trying to move ever since because a great father gave me the direction in which I ought to go.

I challenge you to go into the world. Take your new degrees; take your education and your learning. Make your impact on our society. But more importantly, take your testimony and your faith and your service and your dedication and build a better world, because if you will (and I know you can) there will really come a time when there will be peace on earth, goodwill toward men.

May the Lord bless you to do that, I pray as I leave my witness that I know God lives and that Jesus is the Christ. I think you know I know that, for if you and I are ever in tune with the Spirit, the Spirit has borne that witness to you. God bless you wonderful University students, whom I love and admire and respect, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.