

“Have Ye Sufficiently Retained in Remembrance?”

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I appreciate this opportunity to address you in this devotional setting. Let me be among the first to welcome you to this summer term of 2004. I remember a summer term 29 years ago when I was interviewed and offered a job in Special Collections at the library. I remember the exhilaration of beginning my career. I also remember looking young enough to pass for a student here. Look at the full head of brown hair I had! Each time that I walked past the gauntlet of students passing out flyers, I ended up with a handful of notices. So it was with a good deal of sadness that one day I noticed that the students didn't hand me anything anymore. To them I was old and clearly not a student. Now, with my thinning gray hair, the young men and even some of the young women hold doors open for me. But, you know, age has a lot of advantages. One is that I have 29 years worth of memories that are wonderful and special to me.

With this past Memorial Day, the remembering of D-day 1944, and the recent passing of President Reagan, thoughts came to me concerning the purpose of remembering and what a wonderful gift a memory is to us. It reminded me of an incident in the Book of Mormon as Alma gave up the position of chief judge to focus on the spiritual needs of his people. He said to them:

And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, you that belong to this church, have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? Yea, and have you sufficiently retained in remembrance his [the Lord's] mercy and long-suffering towards them? And moreover, have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell? [Alma 5:6]

As I read this passage, I asked myself the question, “Have you, Scott Duvall, ‘sufficiently retained in remembrance’ the things you should remember?” My answer was, “No, I have not.” But my pondering and praying about this question has led me to some conclusions that I would like to share with you as we all ask ourselves the question, What specific aspects of our lives should we “sufficiently retain in remembrance?”

As we contemplate this question together, may I suggest three elements of our earthly existence that we need to remember: One, we need to remember the past. Two—and this will sound like a contradiction—we need to remember the future. And three, we need to

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remember our Redeemer and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the covenants we have made as part of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ.

Remembering the Past

There are many accounts in the scriptures that tell us *why* we should remember the past. I think of Paul writing to the members of the Church in Jerusalem and bringing their history to their remembrance. In Hebrews, chapter 11, Paul reminded them of Abel, Enoch, and Noah. He brought to their memory the accounts of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He exhorted them to remember Moses and the deliverance of the chosen people from the hands of Pharaoh. Why did he tell them what they already knew? Because he used memory to build their faith. Paul emphasized in almost every verse that all of these prophets acted by faith. Is it not the same with us? As we “sufficiently retain in remembrance” our own past, our faith will be strengthened.

Consider the words of President Hinckley in April of 1997 as the Church began the celebration of its sesquicentennial. He said, “What a wonderful thing it is to have behind us a great and noble body of progenitors! What a marvelous thing to be the recipients of a magnificent heritage that speaks of the guiding hand of the Lord, of the listening ear of His prophets, of the total dedication of a vast congregation of Saints who loved this cause more than life itself!” He then recounted a list of marvelous accomplishments performed by these great and noble pioneers. At the conclusion of this conference talk, President Hinckley said this: “As great things were expected of them, so are they of us. We note what they did with what they had. We have so much more, with an overwhelming challenge to go on and build the kingdom of God. There is so much to do.” Just as Paul in his day, President Hinckley asks us to remember the heritage of our Church history. He wants us to move forward in faith and do our very best to build the kingdom of God.

How do we “sufficiently retain in remembrance” our past? When I asked myself this question, I was astonished at the thought that came to my mind. It hit me that, in fact, my entire career here at BYU has revolved around the theme of remembering, because the main purpose of all curators of books and manuscripts in Special Collections is to collect and make available the cultural memory of the past. Whether it be manuscripts from the Middle Ages or books since the printing of Gutenberg’s Great Bible until now, whether it be our collection of unpublished letters of King Philip II of Spain or the thousands of pamphlets printed in France between 1550 and 1650 that we have, whether it be the hundreds of pioneer and missionary journals in Special Collections or the correspondence of our ancestors who lived long ago, my job has been to make all of this available to you so you can remember.

Let me share with you a passage from one of the journals found in Special Collections. It is from the journal of an 18-year-old woman. I have read this passage to many different classes who have come to Special Collections over the years. This young woman’s name was Emmeline B. Wells. She was born in 1828, and she died in 1921. Her life is an example of faith and devotion. In her later years she served as the general president of the Relief Society of the Church. How do we know of her faith? Because she kept a journal almost all of her long life. These journals are found in Special Collections. One day they all will be found on the Internet and accessed through the library Web site, as you see here. The passage is dated 27 February 1846.

Mrs Whitney, Sarah Ann and myself crossed the river to go to the encampment of the saints. Br. Lot and his wife took Mrs. W. And myself in their carriage. We crossed the river a part of the way on foot, and then went on to the encampment about 7 miles beyond; we reached the destined place about

sunset when we came in view it looked like pictures I have seen of the ancients pitching their tents and journeying from place to place with their cattle and their goods. We repaired immediately to Br. H.C. Kimball's tent, took supper and slept for the first time on the ground. There was a snow storm without yet all was peace and harmony within.

My eyes well up with tears when I read this passage. A refined young woman is forced to leave her comfortable home, cross the frozen river, and sleep for the first time in her life on the ground. If *my* emotions are tender when I read this, how do you think her own descendants feel when they read her diaries? So, how do we remember the past? We study our history, and we specifically study the lives of our own ancestors. In short, we become involved in family history.

In addition, we should “sufficiently retain in remembrance” experiences from our own life. I believe we need to have a memory of our own lessons learned and our own personal feelings felt. Let me give you an example. In 1987 I suffered an accident when I fell 19 feet from the roof of our neighbor’s home onto a concrete driveway. In the middle of a six-hour surgery, Dr. Robert Jackson left the operating room to tell my wife that he would probably have to fuse my ankle bone and that I would not be able to bend my ankle ever after. Try walking without bending your ankle. He returned to the operating room, and he said that as he resumed his efforts, he imagined a way—in his mind’s eye—to fashion 11 screws and 2 plates into a working ankle joint depending almost solely on that hardware because there were no solid pieces of bone with which to work.

I spent almost two weeks in the hospital at that time, and I remember very clearly the overwhelming feelings of an experience that I had one week after the surgery. The nurses had carried me to a chair that Sunday evening to watch television. It was tuned to KBYU, and a program entitled “How Rare a Posses-

sion” came on. As I watched that production, a swirling of simultaneous emotions swept over me. I felt gratitude for an outstanding doctor. I felt the love of our Heavenly Father and His Son. I felt a powerful reaffirmation of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As a result, I felt a strong feeling of recommitment to be a better person and to serve the Lord in any way he desired. I will never ever forget the tears that poured from my eyes as I felt those feelings and learned some valuable lessons. As I look back on it, I know that I was given a gift that without the accident I would not have received. There will be events and happenings in all of our lives that will become defining moments for us. You will know them when they come. We need to “sufficiently retain in remembrance” such times.

Remembering the Future

Now, let’s discuss for a moment what I call “remembering the future.” What I mean by remembering the future is simply that we need to ensure that what we do in the present will serve to help us and our posterity in the future. We should work hard to have good, fun experiences and loving and service-minded relationships now, each day of our life.

I firmly believe that, in addition to being tested in one way or another, we are also here to experience all of the happiness and joy possible. “Men are that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). The Son of God truly meant it when he said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). There is an abundant life to experience, and we can make it happen.

One of my favorite scriptures is found in section 58 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It says that we, as sons and daughters of God, have power within us because we are agents unto ourselves and that our mission and purpose is to be “anxiously engaged in a good cause” (D&C 58:27–28). I submit that as we choose to do good things for and in behalf of

our fellow men and women that we will have joy and will fill our memory with good things.

Now, we can do a little more than just fill our memory. We can write down our feelings and fill pages in a diary. We can record our present thoughts so that we can refer to them later and so that our descendants can learn from our experiences. That’s what Emmeline did. There is a part of the promise of the Spirit of Elijah that we sometimes forget. The hearts of the children will turn to their fathers, but the hearts of the fathers will also turn to their children. In a sense we are all fathers and mothers, and those who come after us are our children. We should remember that our contribution to their future is to leave them our legacy of the present.

For we who are past our youth, we have the opportunity to endure to the end and to make our life full of happy and fulfilling experiences. In May 1831 the Lord counseled Joseph Smith to teach the members of the Church emigrating to Ohio to organize themselves according to the Lord’s laws and that He would provide for them until He commanded “them to go hence.” Then He said, “And the hour and the day is not given unto them [to go hence, to leave], wherefore let them act upon this land as for years, and this shall turn unto them for their good” (D&C 51:17). In other words, the Lord teaches us to live in our present circumstances, to live the abundant and happy life where we are, “as for years.” What a lesson to learn. I submit that as we do so, we will leave a legacy of living because we will remember our children, our grandchildren, and our great grandchildren, just as we were counseled to do by Elder Boyd K. Packer in our last conference.

Remembering Our Savior, Jesus Christ

Each week, on the Sabbath Day, we have the opportunity to renew our baptismal covenants and remember Jesus Christ anew. We listen to young men who have authority given to them to break the bread and bless the water. They say,

O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this [water] to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. [D&C 20:79]

As these young men ask our Heavenly Father to bless and sanctify the water, they pray that we who drink of it may remember our Savior, and further, the emblems are blessed that we may witness to the Father that we do always remember His Son. To witness means to attest, to testify that we remember Jesus Christ. How do we witness to the Father that we remember Him? There are many ways, of course, to remember Christ. We can learn of Him and remember His example and teachings by reading the scriptures. We can remember Him and come to know Him more fully through our prayers. We can demonstrate that we desire to follow Him through our attendance at sacrament meeting. But let me elaborate a bit on two other ways to witness to the Father that we do remember Jesus Christ, His Son. First, our ability to witness will grow stronger day by day as we actively live according to His gospel day by day. Second, as we learn what it feels like to have the Holy Ghost witness to us of the divinity of Christ, we will, in turn, be able to witness unto the Father and others that we remember His Son.

Living the Gospel of Jesus Christ

In the corporate and academic world, we compose vision statements and mission statements as guides for action and behavior in the workplace. Jesus Christ himself stated His vision for our earthly behavior. Simply put, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1–7:29) is Christ’s vision for living a higher law—the law of the gospel, if you will. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, fulfilled

and superseded his own law of Moses and provided a vision for all mankind.

He said: Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are the meek; blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness; blessed are all the pure in heart. He goes on to say: You are the salt of the earth; let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works; don't be angry with your brother; don't swear; turn the other cheek; go the extra mile; love your enemies; pray for them; don't be hypocrites; learn to pray to the Father; learn to serve God and not mammon; seek ye first the kingdom of God; judge not; and do unto others as ye would want them to do unto you. Then at the end of the sermon, Christ counsels us to build our lives (and our homes) upon the rock of His gospel. He asks us to see the vision and fulfill our earthly mission.

In her book *No Doubt About It*, Sister Sheri Dew relates an experience she had while attending a stake conference. A General Authority posed the following question: "How can you tell when a person is converted to Jesus Christ?" The answer, according to this General Authority, is by the way he or she treats other people. Let me suggest to you that the Sermon on the Mount teaches us how to treat other people. This is part of the law of the gospel. As we treat others with kindness, with gentleness, with love unfeigned, as we truly understand that we are agents unto ourselves, we will do good things; and as we do so we will sanctify ourselves, and thus we will actively and daily witness unto our Father that we do indeed remember His Son. Christ really does want us to incorporate the elements of the Sermon on the Mount into our daily interactions with other people. The advice given to little children to ask themselves, what would Jesus do? is good advice for all. Living His gospel, remembering our covenant to keep the law of the gospel, helps us remember Jesus Christ.

Understanding and Remembering the Feelings of the Holy Ghost

At the Feast of the Passover, Christ called the Apostles together for a last supper with them. He taught them that He would soon leave them, and He said, "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1), for "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (John 14:26–27). After his Resurrection, on the day of Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Ghost came upon the Apostles. They did receive comfort and peace. Furthermore, they received confidence in and the promised remembrance of the Lord that enabled them to continue their ministries.

We are promised the same comfort, peace, and power to act as we receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. As we learn what it feels like to experience the promptings of the still, small voice, our witness of Jesus grows stronger. Let me bring to your remembrance the experience of Oliver Cowdery. He sought the ability to translate the plates and the Lord told him:

Be faithful and diligent in keeping the commandments of God, and I will encircle thee in the arms of my love. . . .

Verily, verily, I say unto you, if you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things.

Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God? [D&C 6:20, 22–23]

The Lord, in effect, said, "Don't you remember how you felt the other night? Don't you remember the peace and happiness you felt?" I submit that when we feel discouragement and depression, we should talk to ourselves, like this: "Scott, don't you remember when you

felt peace before when you had a problem? Don't you remember when things worked out and you felt better the last time you felt this way? Don't you remember those feelings of relief and thanksgiving? If things worked out then, why won't they work out now?"

These are the times when we need to reread accounts of feelings felt and lessons learned. In such times of peace, happiness, and comfort, we are feeling the gift of the Holy Ghost at work with us. When we experience those good feelings, we can rest assured that we are feeling the consequences of possessing the gift of the Holy Ghost, and we are thus feeling the witness to us, on the part of this member of the Godhead, that Jesus Christ is real. In this way we also become a witness of Christ. I have often noticed that some people, like my own father and my father-in-law, as they approach the time to leave this life, are at peace with their circumstances. Why? Because they have lived a good life, and they have been tutored by the teachings of the Holy Ghost. They have had problems, to be sure, but they have also learned to feel confident in the witness of our Savior that comes through the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Sometimes the Holy Ghost will give us a warning, a loving chastisement, if you will, that can also serve as a witness to us of the love of Jesus Christ. I recall just such an experience. I had been a bishop of our ward in Payson for a little over five years when a young man who was graduating from Primary and entering the Young Men's organization came into my office. I knew this 12-year-old. You see he was only 7 when I first became his bishop. From the time he was 7 years old until he was 12—well, let's just say that he presented a challenge to his teachers. He came into the office and I remember very distinctly thinking to myself, "Oh, so I have an appointment with ——. I wonder if he will sit still while I talk to him. I hope he grows up soon. I don't know how he can possibly be a responsible deacon, holding the Aaronic

Priesthood. I don't see how he will be a Boy Scout." At that moment, as he sat down across from my desk, the Lord spoke to me. I must have sat there for a long moment not uttering a word as I listened to the still, small voice say: "You must quit thinking ill of this young man. You cannot judge him in that way. You, as a judge in Israel, of all people, must listen to me, because I love this boy. He will one day be a leader in my kingdom."

Do you know what that experience taught me? Well, I left the office that Sunday afternoon and related the experience to my wife and told her that I knew now, more than ever, that the Lord loves us all. Else, why would he teach me that lesson? You can also guess that as I remember that lesson, I remember the feelings and the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Because of that experience, I will always be able to recall that our Savior loves us, and I will become a better witness of Him.

Now, one last point here. There is a blessing attached to our ability and willingness to witness to our Father that we will always remember His Son. The words of the sacrament ordinance end with these words: "That they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen." What a wonderful blessing! As we listen to the Holy Ghost, we witness and attest that we will always remember Christ. Then, as we always remember Christ, the Holy Ghost is with us even more. So it goes, from light to light, precept upon precept, we progress.

I have suggested a pattern of remembering the past, living in the present to leave a legacy for the future, and in all of this remembering Jesus Christ. After substantially preparing this talk, I read again chapter 5 of Helaman and found this pattern there. In verse 6 Helaman, son of Helaman, grandson of Alma the Younger, said to his two sons that he had named them Lehi and Nephi after the first Lehi and Nephi.

Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good. [Helaman 5:6]

He wanted them to remember the past.

Then he said:

Therefore, my sons, I would that ye should do that which is good, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them. [Helaman 5:7]

He desired that his sons live good lives here in the present, that they might leave a legacy of doing good for the future.

Then he spoke to his sons these words:

And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall. [Helaman 5:12]

He fervently counseled his sons to remember, remember their Redeemer and ours, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

My young brothers and sisters, as a person who is now 29 years beyond his student days—as attested by the gray hair—but has memories of lessons learned and feelings felt, I bear you my solemn testimony that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I witness to you that He wants us to be happy and that He has shown us the way. I also bear testimony to you that he does in fact want us to “sufficiently retain in remembrance” lessons learned and feelings felt from our past. Furthermore, He desires that we fully love and enjoy living in the present to the extent that our hearts are turned to remember our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the future. We have the power within us to do good. Finally, Jesus has taught us of the necessity of remembering Him, not for any selfish reasons on His part but to remember Him that we may follow His example and thus be worthy of “peace in this world and eternal life in the world to come” (D&C 59:23). As we remember Him, He promises that He will remember us and that our names will be written in His eternal “book of remembrance” (3 Nephi 24:16). I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.