

“The Last Drop in the Chalice”

VAUGHN J. FEATHERSTONE

The concluding chapter in the book *Les Miserables* is entitled “The Last Drop in the Chalice.” It refers to the final purging in the life of Jean Valjean. He is a white-haired saint whose life has been dealt harshly with by law and justice but who was inspired by a “bishop” to be better. This saintly soul realizes there is one thing left undone to make him a totally honest man. He goes through an immense personal struggle and emerges victorious. All of this he does, sacrificing on the altar of love and religion the adoring felicity that Cosette feels toward him who has been “all” in this life to her. Jean Valjean is convinced that he should unveil before this person, who represents the totality of his reason to live, the dark shadows that cling to his past. With one final resolve he makes all known, fully aware of the expected consequence of alienating the most precious and only soul he has ever loved. The full impact of what I am trying to say can only come as one labors through the 1221-page volume, which I have done five times and again just recently.

This Saintly Man

I have thought a great deal about President Kimball as I have considered this phrase, “the last drop in the chalice.” President Spencer W.

Kimball has given more energy, greater service, and has had the most profound impact, I think, of anyone in the restored Church save the Prophet Joseph only. This is partially due to the numerical size of the Church. It is also due to the shrinking of the size of the Church through modern convenience of travel, communication, and worldwide acceptance to a greater or lesser degree.

President Kimball has suffered with problems of boils, throat cancer, heart disease and surgery, Bell’s palsy, and three subdural hematoma operations. For all that is publicly known about him, there are books of deeds about which only a few know. This saintly man has come as near to walking in the footsteps of Jesus as any living soul.

Only a few know of the times when he has been in the hospital recovering but has taken that time to visit others and has given blessings when possibly he had the greater need. I have known and seen brave, faithful men weep as

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they have talked about President Kimball’s visit to their loved ones when all hope seemed lost.

Many unthinking people have gone to his home or to his office or have cornered him at conference—as if theirs was the only problem in the world that mattered. And this beloved apostle has responded in that very way, as if theirs was the only problem in the world. So many of us who are lesser than he would have resented the imposition.

Even today, in his present condition, I suppose he receives more letters from members of the Church than any other General Authority. I receive only those that are written to him from members residing in the North America Southeast Area, one of thirteen such areas in the world. The letters flow in regularly and we respond for him.

His office is like a minimuseum of gifts from people who have sent their treasured possessions to share with him. I think only a small selection of these gifts are displayed in his office.

There are many special trinkets and gifts from those of Lamanite descent. Also, one artist has portrayed the feelings the minorities especially feel toward President Kimball. There is a beautifully framed rendering of Lamanites and also one of a black family with tears on the cheeks of the father and mother as they gaze toward the Salt Lake Temple. I took a black man and his wife through President Kimball’s office, and this was the one gift that impressed them—also to tears.

“A Real Man”

Consider the giant forward thrust the Church has made during the ministry of President Kimball as prophet. Even now, after five years of limited involvement, President Kimball’s great vision reaches out before us. He has set a work in motion that no enemy or foe will frustrate. Compare the majesty of this magnificent soul to the spiritual pygmies who hurl their own faithless frustrations upon the

Church or try to drag others down to their level of empty faith.

Elder Packer said, “They leave the Church but they can’t leave it alone” (Utah State University baccalaureate address). They publish theological pornography that is damaging to the spirit. None of it is worth casting an eye upon. Do not read the anti-Mormon materials. That is not the way you resolve questions about the truthfulness of the restored gospel. Simply go back and read and ponder and pray about the Book of Mormon and you will know it is true. Those who try to dissuade us from the truth want to tear down what we have, but they do not have anything to replace it when it’s gone. A person who has sexual hang-ups should not read pornographic material as a means of dealing with his or her problem. Likewise, a person who is weak in the faith should not read pornographic theological material. It only destroys and takes away; it never replaces that which was lost.

A poet said it in these words:

*I watched them tearing a building down,
A gang of men in a busy town.
With a ho-heave-ho and a lusty yell,
They swung the beams and the side walls fell.*

*I asked the foreman, “Are these men skilled,
The kind you’d hire were you to build?”
He laughed and said, “Why, no indeed!
Just common laborers are all I need.
They can easily wreck in a day or two
What builders have taken years to do.”*

*And I thought to myself as I went my way:
“What part in the game of life do I play?
Am I a builder who works with care,
measuring life by the rule and square?*

*Am I shaping my deeds to a well-made plan,
patiently doing the best I can?
Or am I a wrecker who walks the town,
Content with the labor of tearing down?”*

[Author unknown]

The names of those who have profited from the sale of anti-Mormon materials will fade and die. Their cause is nonsense. Their hope is desolate, and the eternal consequence of attempting to destroy the faith of the Saints will ring everlastingly down through the generations to their own destruction and that of their offspring. The Lord said,

Wherefore, let them bring forth their strong reasons against the Lord.

Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you — there is no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper;

And if any man lift his voice against you he shall be confounded in mine own due time. [D&C 71:8–10]

Can we not judge by the Spirit the senselessness of those who splinter the doctrines, rearrange the principles, and ignite the fire of apostasy? We ought to have the wisdom and the vision to see where such nonsensical conduct and teachings lead.

Imagine comparing those shallow, empty minds against the contributions of President Kimball. I preside over the southeast area of the United States and the Caribbean, and I tell you—those Saints come near worshipping President Spencer W. Kimball, the Prophet. I think there is hardly a congregation in the South that has not sung “We Ever Pray for Thee.” The words in the third verse are:

*We ever pray for thee with fervent love;
And as the children’s prayer is heard above,
Thou shalt be ever blest, and God will give
All that is meet and best [President Kimball]
while thou shalt live. [Hymns, no. 23]*

We do pray for thee, President Kimball, our noble, beloved Prophet of God. It has been my intention here to share with you some of these thoughts and have you contemplate that this

final era in the life of President Spencer W. Kimball may be the extracting of the “last drops of the chalice.” We wonder if any man reaches perfection in this life and realize that they do not. Nonetheless, President Kimball’s life comes near the mark. Edgar A. Guest wrote a poem entitled “A Real Man.” I have quoted it a few times to a few men. Never was it more accurate than when describing President Spencer W. Kimball.

A Real Man

*Men are of two kinds, and he
Was of the kind I’d like to be.
Some preach their virtues, and a few
Express their lives by what they do.
That sort was he. No flowery phrase
Or glibly spoken words of praise
Won friends for him. He wasn’t cheap
Or shallow, but his course ran deep,
And it was pure. You know the kind.
Not many in a life you find
Whose deeds outrun their words so far
That more than what they seem they are.*

*There are two kinds of lies as well:
The kind you live, the ones you tell.
Back through his years from age to youth
He never acted one untruth.
Out in the open light he fought
And didn’t care what others thought
Nor what they said about his fight
If he believed that he was right.
The only deeds he ever hid
Were acts of kindness that he did.*

*What speech he had was plain and blunt.
His was an unattractive front.
Yet children loved him; babe and boy
Played with the strength he could employ,
Without one fear, and they are fleet
To sense injustice and deceit.
No back door gossip linked his name
With any shady tale of shame.*

*He did not have to compromise
With evil-doers, shrewd and wise,
And let them ply their vicious trade
Because of some past escapade.*

*Men are of two kinds, and he
Was of the kind I'd like to be.
No door at which he ever knocked
Against his manly form was locked.
If ever man on earth was free
And independent, it was he.
No broken pledge lost him respect,
He met all men with head erect,
And when he passe [s] I think there [will be sent]
A soul to yonder firmament
So white, so splendid and so fine
It [comes] almost to God's design.
[Edgar A. Guest, *A Heap o' Livin'*]*

Loving Counsel

The purpose of giving you this background is a result of deep pondering. I have tried desperately to consider what President Kimball would teach and admonish you if he were here. I have read much of what he has written. I have studied and pondered his talks, and I think I have a limited understanding of his style.

I wonder if he wouldn't counsel you in this way: "I have a great spiritual disturbance in my soul. I feel constantly at unrest. It seems that many of our most valiant youth and young adults are falling prey to the deadly tactical warfare of the adversary. Never has there been so much confusion and disruption in our strong LDS homes and total abandonment of the principles of truth in others. Hardly a family has not been penetrated to a greater or lesser degree."

Models for Living

I visited a stake in a distant city. I make it a custom to memorize their statistics, which at least gives me some slight understanding of activity levels. In this stake almost every

statistic was down dramatically, including sacrament meeting, priesthood meeting, Relief Society, Primary, Sunday School, youth activity, tithing, and temple activity. I think I had a sense of righteous indignation, maybe even anger, that we had let Satan take over so much real estate.

I questioned the stake leaders, and together we prayed and pondered for an answer. It came. This stronghold community of the Church had not especially been aware of the subtleties of Satan's strategy. Many in this farming community had purchased satellite receivers, video shops had opened, and naive parents were letting R- and X-rated movies into their homes through satellite channels, and the youth and even some parents were renting them. Imagine violating the second most sacred place on the earth, the homes of righteous Latter-day Saints.

I think President Kimball would speak boldly against this insidious evil. I think he would counsel parents to monitor what is brought in and out of the home to see that it reflects an LDS standard.

I believe that President Kimball's heart would be troubled that Satan is making a mockery of sacred things and our young people are unsuspectingly being influenced in a more terrible way that we ever would have supposed. We are a peculiar people and that is the strength of this church. We can have our families extended into eternity and become like him. I think it is the most glorious concept ever to be given to man by our God, and I love him for it.

We teach a Word of Wisdom that the modern scientists are discovering is an inspired health law. We have family home evening and family prayer. We pay tithes and offerings, and our people prosper. We go to the temple and perform vicarious work for the dead, and we send out our true ambassadors as missionaries to the world. We believe in Christ and we live

his commandments, and we do so everlastingly many more things as we serve our Lord.

Why then can we not recognize the tactics of the evil one? We should walk in the sun as at noonday.

What Satan has done is perpetrated a great lie upon us. To our youth he has lied: "You can keep your standards but you do not have to be different. You do not need to violate the Word of Wisdom, but you do not have to make an issue out of the things that do not really matter." Our very dress and grooming reflects our inward values.

If you will watch and pattern your dress and conduct after the people of real substance, you will not go wrong. Men and women of substance have the inner stability and well-being to follow the conservative, inoffensive dress standards. Remember, there is a time and a season for everything under the heavens.

I had an old red sweatshirt that I used to wear when I would float the western rivers. Then my wife threw it away. There is a different standard of dress for various activities. However, when we are in public, it makes good sense to not groom or dress in a way that will attract undue attention or detract from the surrounding scenery.

Be a Servant-Leader

I think President Kimball might instruct us in the benefits of serving. Robert K. Greenleaf wrote a book entitled *Servant Leadership*. He states:

The idea of The Servant as Leader came out of reading Hermann Hesse's Journey to the East. In this story we see a band of men on a mythical journey, probably also Hesse's own journey. The central figure of the story is Leo who accompanies the party as the servant who does their menial chores, but who also sustains them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence. All goes well until Leo disappears. Then the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. They cannot

make it without the servant Leo. The narrator, one of the party, after some years of wandering finds Leo and is taken into the Order that had sponsored the journey. There he discovers that Leo, whom he had known first as servant, was in fact the titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble leader.

*One can muse on what Hesse was trying to say when he wrote this story. We know that most of his fiction was autobiographical, that he led a tortured life, and that Journey to the East suggests a turn toward the serenity he achieved in his old age. There has been much speculation by critics on Hesse's life and work, some of it centering on this story which they find the most puzzling. But to me, this story clearly says that the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness. Leo was actually the leader all of the time, but he was servant first because that was what he was, deep down inside. [Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p. 7]*

Brother Hugh Nibley, a great soul, seems to concur with this in a marvelous discourse called "Management Versus Leadership." Greenleaf also stated:

Those who choose to follow this principle will not casually accept the authority of existing institutions. Rather, they will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted servants. . . .

*My thesis, that more servants should emerge as leaders, or should follow only servant-leaders, is not a popular one. [Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, p. 10]*

And again:

The servant-leader is servant first—as Leo was portrayed. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is

sharply different from one who is leader first.
[Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, p. 13]

And finally:

Not much happens without a dream. And for something great to happen, there must be a great dream. Behind every great achievement is a dreamer of great dreams. Much more than a dreamer is required to bring it to reality; but the dream must be there first. [Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, p. 16]

President Kimball's life could be summarized in the words servant-leader with a dream. President Kimball said: "Make no small plans. They have no magic to stir men's souls" (Regional Representatives' seminar). His life has been one of service, and through his service he has served in the most important office on the face of the earth, Prophet of the Living God.

Behold, I say unto you that because I said unto you that I had spent my days in your service, I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God.

And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God. [Mosiah 2:16–17]

Cultivate a Sense of Humor

I believe President Kimball would encourage a sense of humor. I think you will need it in the days ahead. You may need it in some of your classes, or on some of your dates, or at work.

I understand that Robbie Bosco is a fighter, that he likes to win. They said one day a few weeks back that he was carrying a list of all the men he could whip. Leon White came up to him and said, "I understand you have a list of all the fellows you can whip." Robbie said, "That's right." Leon White said, "Is my name on that list?" Robbie responded that it was.

Leon White said, "You can't whip me and I'll prove it." Robbie said: "That's OK. I'll just take your name off the list."

Two weeks ago, President Holland referred to the miraculous accomplishments in space that seem almost commonplace now. It reminded me of a cartoon of two fleas on a dog. They were leaning back-to-back against a hair and having a deep discussion. Off in the distance they saw another dog. One of them turned to his companion and said, "Do you think there is life on other dogs?"

Gene Perrett, comedy writer and humorist, said, "Humor is serious business." He is a writer for many of the top comedians. He shared an experience Bob Hope had:

Bob Hope was to present an award to a gentleman by the name of Charlie Boswell. . . . Charlie Boswell was this country's outstanding blind golfer. That's what the award was for. These gentlemen play a great game of golf. They have an assistant line the club up, but they swing themselves, and they hit the ball a ton. They really play a great game.

When he got to the podium, Bob Hope couldn't resist kidding him a little bit. He said, "Outstanding blind golfer, huh. I'd like to play you sometime." Charlie Boswell said, "Mr. Hope, I would love to play you a round of golf." Hope said, "I don't think you understand. I only play for money." Charlie Boswell said, "I like to have a little side bet going, too. It makes things more interesting." And Hope said, "But what kind of a handicap would I have to give you?" Charlie said, "I'll tell you what, Mr. Hope, I'll play you even up." Hope was delighted. He said, "What time?" Charlie Boswell said, "Midnight." . . .

Abraham Lincoln was once in a debate for public office. His opponent spoke first and Lincoln sat on the platform and listened. His opponent kept pointing to Lincoln and referring to him as a liar, and a cheat, and a two-faced-politician. Lincoln never got angry and never showed any emotion. He sat there calmly and listened. When it was his turn to speak, he stepped to the front of the podium

and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, if I were two faced, would I be wearing this one?" [Gene Perrett, "Humor Is Serious Business: Resist That Urge to Strike Back," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 15 August 1985, pp. 651–52]

Then Gene Perrett told about an experience to which some of you may relate:

When my daughter was a sophomore in high school, she'd been wanting to date this one boy. Finally the school sponsored a trip where they rode the train down towards San Diego, had dinner, and took the train back. This gentleman asked her to be his date. I waited up till she got home, and when she came in I asked her, "Honey, how did things go?" She said, "Dad, it's the worst time I ever had in my life." I said, "Why? I thought you were crazy about this guy." She said, "All he did was talk about himself. All the way down how he plays football, what school he's going to, what he's going to major in. He's the most egotistical person I ever met in my life. . . ." I said, "Didn't he see what he was doing? Didn't he realize that all he was doing was talking about himself?" She said, "Just for one brief moment . . . around dessert time. He said to me, 'All I'm doing is talking about myself. How about you. What do you think of me?'" [Perrett, "Humor Is Serious Business," p. 652]

Making Use of Good Music

I think President Kimball would then tell you of the value of learning to love good and great music. This one great blessing will reward you a thousandfold.

As a bishop, a stake president, or as a General Authority, you sit on the stand and observe the Saints. Music is absolutely an essential element in increasing spirituality. Every Sunday at church when sacred hymns are sung, many in the congregation will quietly weep as they sing—some from heavy hearts, some whose lives have turned back to God and who feel his refreshing forgiveness, others whose hearts are simply filled with the love of

God and music has stirred those sensitivities. You will find in life that there is need for a sense of timing and a special awareness that leads one to listen to appropriate music for specific purposes and occasions.

I recently, without any warning or preparation, had a women's chorus sing "We Ever Pray for Thee." The congregation's thoughts were turned to our beloved prophet, and tears flowed freely. The choir felt what they sang, and deep emotion filled their bosoms. President Kimball would want you to make use of good music in your life.

Be a Straight-Arrow

How often President Kimball has reminded us to be pure. "Purity of heart" is a marvelous quest. "Unto the pure [in heart] all things [indeed] are pure" (Titus 1:15). The controversy of AIDS, homosexual conduct, and other perversions of life are so constant and common that we almost become sympathetic and understanding to the point of condoning. The gospel of Jesus Christ is for every soul that walks the earth. Its doors of love, purity, charity, and forgiveness are opened wide to all who would enter. But even the Great God of Heaven cannot save a man in his sins. We sometimes wonder if there are any in the Church who have not been singed by the flames of transgression. Let me say to you: There are hundreds of thousands of our young people who are purer and cleaner than any generation that ever walked the earth. To you who are clean, please know you are not alone. God bless you. Continue in that.

President Archie Brugger of the San Antonio East Stake in Texas shared an experience worthy of your interest. While he served in the military (in Germany, I believe), a young officer came to him one day and said, "Colonel Brugger, do you know there are only eight straight arrows in our entire company?" A straight-arrow is a soldier who does not have an illicit affair with a woman. He said, "I know

you are a straight-arrow and so am I.” A few weeks later this young officer returned again and said, “Colonel Brugger, now there are only four.” It was only a matter of a few more weeks and he returned a third time and said, “Colonel Brugger, there are only two, you and me.” President Brugger said to this young man: “I intend to remain clean. I am a Mormon and I have a wife back in the United States who is keeping herself clean also while I am away. I trust her and she trusts me, and we both honor the teachings of the Church.” The young man said: “You are leaving in six weeks to go back to the United States and I will remain here. I don’t know how much longer I can hold out.” President Brugger said, “My young friend, if I can do it you can do it. The Lord will help you.”

In the military there may not be too many straight-arrows, but I testify to you, in this church there are. I pray you may be one of them. If not, then become one.

I also believe President Kimball would want you to love integrity and to honor those who have it. He would want you to use men and women of integrity as models for living. President Nathan Eldon Tanner has been known among the Brethren and in the community as Mr. Integrity. But let me say to you that every member of the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles are the greatest men of integrity I know.

My early family life and business life brought me into association with men who lacked integrity. Sadly, we also see it in the Church and it breaks our hearts. We see some of our returned missionaries making compromises. Stories come to us about some who have pornographic materials in their apartments, who seemingly went through a two-year mission but the two-year mission did not go through them. Elder Monson was informed of a transgressing missionary in the field. We related the consequences of his conduct—a Church court, being sent home, family

embarrassment, loss of membership, etc. Elder Monson listened very tenderly, and then he said, “The Brethren and the Prophet himself grieve when they learn of these incidents.” I know they do. We all do.

Integrity is honesty to the very center of our souls. It is living what we profess and what we testify. I pray that sometime in the life of every person in this room it may be said, “He/she is a person of integrity.”

Practice the Pure Love of Christ

How often President Kimball in his speaking and writing, equally as eloquent to me as Isaiah, has reminded us to practice charity—the pure love of Christ. Charity never faileth. It is the noblest of all virtues. It covereth a multitude of sins. One who has true charity will live every commandment and will love unconditionally. Before charity, all things wash away—pride, impatience, vanity, unkindness, disloyalty, envy, jealousy, uncouthness, unholiness.

Remember, “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Become a Man of Christ

Finally, I think President Kimball would say to you, “Become a ‘man of Christ,’ a disciple of the Master”—“man of Christ” referring to mankind, men and women. Thus we read in Helaman, chapter 3, verses 29 and 30:

Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked—

And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with

Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out.

“Thy Will Be Done”

The gospel changes lives. Now, of course, in a few minutes we cannot say all that, in my humble opinion, President Kimball would like to say. But each one could ask himself, as I have done, “What would President Kimball’s King Benjamin discourse be to us if he were here to deliver it?” President Kimball has been so pure, so sweet, so Christ-like that to suppose there might be one final test, one final drop of the chalice, might seem inappropriate. I think not. Abraham, Moses, and Jesus all went through it, as did Joseph and Brigham. With President Kimball it may be that he is unable to serve in this high and holy calling the way he would like, to accept the Father’s will and submit one final time to the key of his ministry, “Thy will be done.”

I know that President Spencer W. Kimball is a prophet of God. My soul is humbled to the dust for the privilege of living in his day.

Whatever he is, his wife also is. She is not a whit behind him. President and Sister Kimball, if you happen to be listening, I love you. I hope I have not misrepresented anything to these students on the greatest campus in the world.

I bear my testimony to you today that I know that God lives and that this church is the only authorized agency to function in his behalf. There is no other. I know the Book of Mormon is true, and I would rather lay down my life this instant than deny that Nephi, King Benjamin, Alma, Ammon, Moroni, Mormon, and the Brother of Jared were prophets of God. I know they were. As I stated to the missionaries, the enemies of the Church could line up four abreast from San Francisco to Salt Lake City and come to me to try to convince me that the Church was not true, and when the last one had passed by I would still know that this church is the only true church on the face of the earth.

I bear that sacred testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.