

Missionary Work

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Permit me first to express appreciation for the beauty of the music that we have just heard. As I thrilled with you to the beauty of that harmony and the sweet words that they have sung to us today, my mind reflected on the scripture recorded in the 25th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, verse twelve, where the Lord said, “For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads.” I certainly would pray this morning that that would be realized in their behalf because of the spirit that they have provided for us in this devotional.

I am honored to be here. It is a thrill to be on this campus and to feel of your spirit. I am grateful to have the chance to compliment Coach Edwards and his associates and this great football team for their accomplishments. Each weekend as I come home from a stake conference I can hardly wait to pick the paper up to see how BYU did. President Oaks announced that I was a graduate from the University of Utah; but, Coach Edwards, I think that you know for whom I will be cheering this weekend.

My experience in the past few years have brought me to this campus frequently, not as a

student or a faculty member but one who came to this campus on business and enjoyed the atmosphere that I found here.

But today, my brothers and sisters, I find myself in a situation I never dreamed would be possible. I am moved by what I feel and see. Though it is humbling and frightening and a little bit overwhelming to look into your faces, I am excited with the challenge.

We live in a beautiful world—a world filled with opportunities and blessings. Too often, however, we hear the negative: that this is a wicked world, that it is a terrible time to live, that the challenges of today’s life are too great, and similar pessimistic statements. There are, I am sure, reasons for such statements, but I feel that there has never been a greater period in which to live than today.

This is a day in which the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored for the blessing of all mankind. This is the dispensation of the fullness of times. The priesthood has been given to

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man for the blessing of all our Father's children. The ordinances are available to provide the greatest of all the gifts of God, even eternal life, to each of our Father's children if they will live in obedience to the commandments and endure to the end. Through the Restoration, about which this choir has just so beautifully sung, there is available to us a sure knowledge of where we came from, why we are here, and where we go at the conclusion of this mortal probation. We are directed by apostles and prophets who, as the apostle Paul suggested, are the foundation upon which the church is built, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone (see Ephesians 2:19–20). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been organized, and the Savior himself has said that this is "the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased" (D&C 1:30). This Church is directed by the Savior through a great prophet, even Spencer W. Kimball. He is the Lord's spokesman, and I bear my solemn witness to you today that he is one of the greatest that has ever been so called and ordained.

Yes, this is a wonderful time in which to live, and I am confident that because of your faithfulness in the premortal life the Lord has withheld your spirits to come forth *now* to accomplish a great work. In October of 1830 the Lord made the following statement: "For behold, the field is white already to harvest; and it is the eleventh hour, and the last time that I shall call laborers into my vineyard" (D&C 33:3). If it was the eleventh hour in 1830, may I ask what time it is today?

None of us knows the hour or the day when the Savior will make his appearance. However, we do know that before that day will come the "gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations" (Matthew 24:14) and "every man shall hear the fullness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language" (D&C 90:11).

This is the reason that President Kimball has continually emphasized the urgency of this work. Hardly a conference passes in which he does not remind us of the need to pray for the work to expand and grow. Just a year ago, in the October general conference, President Kimball made the following statement:

There are many nations where we have not been able to get in, to get visas, or get passports; and it is very important. If we are to fulfill the responsibility given to us by the Lord on the Mount of Olives to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, then we will need to open the doors to these nations. . . . We've hardly scratched the surface. We need far more missionaries, and we need more countries that will think of us as being their friends and will give us an opportunity to come to their nations and give to their people the finest thing in the world—the gospel of Christ—which can be their salvation and their great happiness.

[And then this great soul who is our prophet continued:] *I'm hoping that every [person] listening to me . . . will make it a solemn practice in regular life to pray constantly for this great blessing to bless the brethren who are making a special effort to reach the leaders of these nations and to convince them that we have only good for their people. We will make them good citizens, we will make them good souls, and we will make them happy and joyous.*

I hope that [in] every family . . . the father and the mother and the children in their turns will offer prayers which will be centered around this very important element—that the doors of the nations might be opened to us and then, secondly, that the missionaries, the young men and women of the Church, may be anxious to fill those missions and bring people into the Church. . . .

So I'm hoping that, beginning now, the prayers of the Saints will be greatly increased from what they have been in the past, that we will never think of praying except we pray for the Lord to establish his program and make it possible that we can carry the gospel to his people as he has commanded.

[Spencer W. Kimball, "Fundamental Principles to Ponder and Live," *Ensign*, November 1978, pp. 45–46]

How many of you, my brothers and sisters, are praying for these things as the Prophet has asked? How many of you prayed this morning for these things—that the doors of the nations might be opened and that there would be more missionaries? How many of you here who have not made that decision to serve a mission have not only offered that prayer but have committed to do as we have been asked not only by President Kimball, but also by the Lord? Remember, the Lord's prophet has said, "I'm hoping . . . that we will never think of praying except we pray for" these things. Now, let me ask one further question: How many of you will pray this evening or this night for these things?

I remember that, shortly after we concluded the mission presidents' seminar in June of this year, we met in the Missionary Department of the Church with great concern that several of our new mission presidents who were going to Spanish-speaking countries could not get visas and would not be able to enter those countries. We were concerned because the mission presidents whose places they were to take were being released and there would be no leadership. Our prayers were unitedly offered in earnestness to the Lord, and within a matter of a week to two weeks those visas were received and our mission presidents were able to enter those countries.

I think it would be of interest to you to know where we are in this great missionary effort. When President Kimball became the President of the Church at the end of 1973—not yet six years ago—there were only 108 missions in the world. Today, under the direction of this great soul, we have 175. One of the Brethren was recently doing some figuring and concluded that if we were to go into China today—for which opportunity President Kimball has

asked us to pray—with missions organized at about the same rate as we have them here in the United States, we would need 240 missions just in China alone! Obviously we have a great deal of work ahead of us yet.

Back in 1973 there were 17,258 missionaries; that number has increased today to a number in excess of 29,000. And not only do we have more missionaries, but they are doing a more effective job: convert baptisms per missionary have increased from 4.6 per missionary in 1973 to 6.5 per missionary today.

In 1973 we baptized 77,820 converts. This year we expect to have as many as 190,000, and possibly 200,000, of our Father's children enter the waters of baptism.

Under the direction of our Prophet, great strides have been made; but much more is left to be accomplished. As President Kimball spoke to the Regional Representatives and others on March 30 of this year, he gave emphasis to those areas:

I continue to be impressed that we should do more to reach the large groups of language minorities in our major cities. We should continue to pray individually and in our homes and in our councils and in our meetings and petition the Lord to assist us to find a way to reach the hearts and minds of leaders of nations—China, Russia, eastern European countries—yes, all countries that are now closed or have restrictions on the teaching of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that the word might go forward in all the world as has been commanded. Our Father does and will hear our prayers—of this I am certain. But we must ask in faith, nothing wavering. Then we must be prepared to enter once the gates are opened.

It appears that the time is not too distant when the gospel might be preached to those good people [in China]. There are 900 million of them. Are we ready for such an undertaking?

With President Kimball's question, "Are we ready for such an undertaking?" may I ask you

another question: Are *you* ready for such an undertaking?

How does one determine his or her readiness to serve the Lord so that individually and collectively we might bring to pass the fulfillment of this divine injunction?

And this gospel shall be preached unto every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.

And the servants of God shall go forth, saying with a loud voice: Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come;

And worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. [D&C 133:37–39, emphasis added]

To answer the above question of how one determines his readiness, may I turn with you to the pages of the Book of Mormon? Being a father, I personally find the teachings of this great book of marvelous assistance in my stewardship. This volume of scripture begins on a family relationship, as Nephi states that he was born of goodly parents. “Therefore,” Nephi continues, “I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father” (1 Nephi 1:1). How grateful I am for the same experience in my life; for I was also taught in the learning of wise and good parents.

In the fifth chapter of Helaman, another individual by the name of Nephi, son of Helaman, speaks of the conditions that existed in his day (which was about thirty years before the birth of the Savior). Much as it is in our day, he indicates that “they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good.” He continues by stating that, because of this,

They were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted. . . .

And it came to pass that Nephi had become weary because of their iniquity; and he yielded up the judgment-seat, and took it upon him to preach

the word of God all the remainder of his days.
[Helaman 5:2, 4]

The conditions existing in their days were much like they are in our day. I suggest that you and I must make the same commitment as did Nephi and his brother Lehi—that we take it upon ourselves to preach the word of God the remainder of our days. This does not mean that we leave our educational pursuits or our employment, but that we conscientiously make every attempt to share the priceless message of the gospel with those around us. We do this by example and by word.

Nephi and Lehi made this decision based largely on the teachings that they received from their father Helaman. The record states, “For they remembered the words which their father Helaman spake unto them.” They then shared with you and me this great counsel which helped them to make wise decisions in this life and to be successful. Listen carefully to the counsel of a wise father: “Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should . . . keep the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these words” (Helaman 5:6).

He then taught them of their progenitors that came from Jerusalem to America so that, as they remembered them, they would think of their works and faith and know that they were good. Then he continued in his counsel:

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.

And now my sons, behold I have somewhat more to desire of you, which desire is, that ye may not do these things that ye may boast, but that ye may do these things to lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, yea, which is eternal, and which fadeth not away; yea, that ye may have that precious gift of eternal life.

He then asked them to remember the words of King Benjamin and also of Amulek:

. . . There is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come, yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world.

. . . That he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins.

And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls. [Helaman 5:7–11]

May I suggest to you this same counsel: first, keep the commandments of God, and declare them unto the people by word and deed; second, strive all the days of your life to do good; third, do it not to boast, but to lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, that you might have that precious gift of eternal life; and fourth, remember that there is only one way whereby men can be saved, and that is through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, for he has come to redeem them from sin if they will but repent.

Helaman then concludes his instruction to his sons with one of my favorite passages of scripture. I pray that it will now rest on your souls with an intensity that you cannot forget for the rest of your lives.

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]

You are here at Brigham Young University because deep down inside you desire to be successful in life. No one wants to be a failure. The Lord wants you to be successful, and Helaman says if you will build you foundation “upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God. . . which is a sure foundation,” you will not fall.

When we build on this foundation we commit all that we have to the Lord—our talents, energies, love—yes, our heart, might, mind, and strength to his service. When furthering our education we recognize that “the glory of God is intelligence” (D&C 93:36); and so we do our very best, realizing that this is a preparation not only for our professional life but, even more importantly, for better service to the Lord.

If you will build on this foundation you will have the physical, mental, and spiritual strength to withstand the winds, even the whirlwinds of evil, the hail and the mighty storms that are now being unleashed and will continue to be unleashed with even greater intensity than ever before. Satan’s power and influence is frightening, and unless we are properly prepared, he can drag us “down to the gulf of misery and endless wo.”

Helaman’s children remembered their father’s counsel, as I pray that you will. “They went forth,” the scripture indicates, “keeping the commandments of God.” They taught the gospel from city to city with great power, and they were so convincing that “eight thousand of the Lamanites who were in the land of Zarahemla and round about [were] baptized unto repentance” (Helaman 5:14,19). Think with me for a moment of the cities represented in this audience today! Think what can and should happen because of your influence—not just here at BYU, but as you eventually are scattered to the various cities and nations where the Lord will place you. I think frequently of the scripture in the 100th section of

the Doctrine and Covenants, verse four, where the Lord says, “Therefore, I, the Lord, have suffered you to come unto this place; for thus it was expedient in me for the salvation of souls.” A significant part of building on that sure foundation is imparting to others the “glad tidings” so that all of our brothers and sisters can achieve eternal life.

If we correctly understand our eternal destiny, we understand that success consists of becoming as God is. We are his children, and we have the potential of living as he lives and doing what he does. As we contemplate this awesome concept, however, we must remember that God is a missionary. It is his work and glory “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The essence of his work is missionary work, and the earthly ministry of his beloved son, Jesus Christ, exemplifies this true pattern for living. If we neglect missionary work in order to pursue other interests, even worthy interests, we can never expect to be like our Father.

Knowing this, our Father in Heaven has provided the means by which we can become like him. Joseph Smith said,

God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. . . . He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself. [Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1938), p. 354]

It is not surprising to discover, therefore, that the really important things that we do in the Church are intimately associated with missionary work. In fact, our commitment to this work began even before we entered mortality. I quote a statement from John A. Widtsoe, former apostle of the Church:

In our pre-existent state, in the day of the great council, we made a certain agreement with the Almighty. The Lord proposed a plan, conceived by him. We accepted it. Since the plan is intended for all men, we become parties to the salvation of every person under that plan. We agreed, right then and there, to be not only saviors for ourselves, but measurably saviors for the whole human family. We went into a partnership with the Lord. The working out of the plan became then not merely the Father’s work, and the Savior’s work, but also our work. The least of us, the humblest, is in partnership with the Almighty in achieving the purpose of the eternal plan of salvation. [Quoted in Roy W. Doxey, *Latter-day Prophets and the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978), 1:28-29]

Elder Widtsoe said this in the context of doing work for the dead, but it applies equally as well to the work we do for the salvation of the living, both members and nonmembers; for it is all the same work of saving souls.

As we progress in mortality, we renew these premortal covenants, primarily through the ordinances of the gospel. For instance, we all know that the covenant of baptism includes the obligation to “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death” (Mosiah 18:9). Perhaps some of us have not recognized, however, that the Savior made specific reference to our missionary duties when he instituted the sacrament. Joseph Smith was inspired to add a significant phrase in both Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts of the Last Supper. To quote Mark, “And he said unto them, This is in remembrance of my blood which is shed for many, and the new testament which I give unto you; *for of me ye shall bear record unto all the world*” (Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 14:23, emphasis added).

Much more could be said about the power that comes through eternal covenants, but this is sufficient to show that the Lord has not left

this important work to chance. But in addition, these obligations are the source of greatest joy. Missionary work is not a task we perform in order to qualify for the blessing of joy; it is an inherently joyful work. The Lord said, “if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!” (D&C 18:16). In addition, he said,

And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb; and whoso shall publish peace, yea, tidings of great joy, how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be. [1 Nephi 13:37]

We are also promised that by testifying and warning our neighbors we are cleansed from our sins: “Nevertheless, ye are blessed, for the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon; and they rejoice over you, and your sins are forgiven you” (D&C 62:3). Not only are our own sins forgiven, but we are cleansed from the responsibility for the sins of others. In Jacob’s words:

And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day. [Jacob 1:19]

I can testify of the joy and spiritual power that comes from being a missionary, because some of the most memorable experiences in my life are a result of this glorious work. I remember visiting with a young lady in a shopping mall in Arizona one day who was weeping because of the death of her husband. I suggested to her that there is a way that she could be with her husband for time and for all eternity. She was concerned and asked about it; I enlisted the help of our missionaries to teach her.

Several weeks later, while visiting in that same community, I went to her home with the stake president, was invited in, and walked to a piano where sat a beautiful picture of her and her husband Bob and their three lovely sons. This time she was weeping for joy as she pointed to the picture and indicated that on the morrow she would be baptized into the Church. Then, holding onto my hand tightly, she said, “Just think, Brother Goaslind—in one year from tomorrow we can be an eternal family.” There is nothing that brings greater joy than doing missionary work in the kingdom.

I conclude with this statement from Elder John H. Taylor: “We only find happiness for the blessings that we have received by seeing that other people have the same opportunity” (in Conference Report, April 1944, p. 136). Therefore, if we desire to have the joy that is our potential, my brothers and sisters, we must participate in God’s work of saving souls—right here and right now at BYU, throughout your entire life, and into eternity.

I bear witness to you that this is God’s work, that he lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God; and my solemn and sacred witness today is that at the head of the Church today is a prophet, even Spencer W. Kimball. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Amen.