

# *Your Purpose and Responsibility*

DAVID B. HAIGHT

As I look upon this vast audience, I feel as if it must be the finals of the NCAA with BYU playing for the championship. But this is a thrilling sight to see all of you here and to be here in your presence. What a glorious occasion and opportunity for me to be here and to feel of your warmth and spirit and affection this night! Now I pray that I may have an interest in your faith and prayers; and that the light of Christ, the spirit of truth which emanated from the source of all intelligence and that lighteneth every man (see D&C 88:6, 11–13), will bless us all so that you will understand what I am impressed to say; and that I will feel your spirit and acceptance of what I have to say. I was impressed with the song by the choir: “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee.” I hope and pray that we might have that spirit here this night that we might communicate with one another.

As has been announced, this is the first twelve-stake fireside of the new academic year. Many of you are new on campus, I understand—some six thousand freshmen. We also welcome tonight some twelve hundred missionaries sitting over here in the dark suits. They are studying a new language at the Language Training Mission, and we welcome them and all the other returning students and

faculty members here this night. It is an exciting experience to learn, to stretch our minds at this most unusual University. This is a wonderful time to be alive and to be on this campus with the inspired leadership of this University. President Oaks and his wife are sitting here with us tonight—isn’t it wonderful that he can be here with us, the president of this great institution? And in addition there are here on campus student branches and stakes, to give each of you encouragement and guidance in preparing for your life’s opportunities. What a unique opportunity and combination, all to assist you personally!

Alma wrote, “For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God” (Alma 34:32). As part of God’s plan, the spirits of men come to this earth and follow a journey from infancy to childhood to youth, marriage, and old age—all the time learning, growing, and developing character and wisdom. Fortunately, all of us in this vast audience tonight have at

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least a partial understanding of what the Lord wants us to do or become or accomplish. For his divine purpose is clearly stated in scripture and by living prophets: it is to save all mankind. Many young people like you in other settings and in different climates from this tonight, being without purpose or destination, lose their way; but others through fortunate circumstances make wise decisions, recognize divine truths, and arrive at the destination God has planned for all of his children: "To bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). You will be taught and encouraged by men and women at this University who believe that the true gospel of the Savior has been restored and is again upon the earth. Your professors will not cause you to doubt divine truths. They will not teach of the anti-Christ, but in a positive manner will help each of you to gain an understanding of this mortal existence, to enter into covenants, to understand the commandments which will result in your eventually occupying a glorified place in our Father's kingdom.

President Kimball, in a motion picture now being shown at stake conferences throughout the world to encourage missionary involvement of all Church members, points to a world map and quotes the Savior's direction to the apostles: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The prophet emphasizes that the Savior knew the bounds of the earth when he said that. He did not say to go only to Egypt or Greece or the Arab world or Rome; He knew of all the nations that existed then, and the nations that would emerge. He, the Creator, knew what growth would take place then, today, and in the future.

The Lord told Moses, "For mine own purpose have I made these things." In speaking of the Creation, he said, "I also created them for mine own purpose; all things are numbered unto me, for they are mine and I know them" (Moses 1:31, 33, 35). We know that when he

directed the apostles to go to all nations God knew not only the geography and physical development of the earth, but where people would eventually settle and live. He knew not only that, but he also knew and knows so well the weakness of people and how we might or will succumb to the ways and evils of the world. The possibility is ours to fall into the trap of the tempters who, like ourselves, have their free agency and will try to persuade us to "eat and drink; for tomorrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32), as Paul told the Corinthians, and to become as miserable as they.

I quoted the Lord's words: "For mine own purpose have I made these things." "Mine own purpose"—isn't that an interesting word, "purpose"? The Lord's purpose is to save all mankind. Can you think of a more majestic purpose, to save us all—all who will hearken and obey? Have you new students coming to this campus established a purpose for your life, your own purpose? What are you trying to do or what do you want to get or to accomplish? The establishment of a worthwhile purpose is a beacon for all to follow, a guide, a white line down the middle of the highway on a foggy night.

What do you expect to achieve? What do you want to become? Many of you are just beginning at the University and, rather than waiting for a commencement speaker to suggest lofty goals four years from now, what a blessing it would be if you would establish a clear purpose now, even tonight. You are adults with responsibilities; you are a chosen group with unlimited potential. Establish goals; identify them, study them, follow them. Set in neon lights your purpose, your plans, your future, your hopes—and if they are right they will be in harmony with God's purpose for you.

There is so much potential in each of us, and a story told of Michelangelo illustrates this point. As the sculptor was chiseling a block of marble, a boy came every day and watched shyly. When the figure of David emerged and

appeared from that stone, complete for all the world to admire, the boy asked Michelangelo, "How did you know he was in there?" If we merely dream without doing any chiseling, our dreams return unfulfilled to the never-never land where the word "impossible" is supreme. The enjoyment of achievement comes only to those who see a vision of what might be, form a purpose, and then get busy.

The other afternoon, as a break from a busy day, I took a few minutes and strolled amid the flowers and lawn and trees and people of Temple Square. I stood off to one side in the shade of a tree and gazed at the scene—people, people, people everywhere, all shapes and sizes, in vacation outfits of every color, going from building to building with cameras clicking. I watched the people looking at the temple and I stared at it with them. Massive, majestic—of course it looks like it will last forever, spires touching the sky. Others were admiring the Tabernacle; it is unusual of course, a pioneer engineering feat. As I watched the scene I thought, "Why do people come to Temple Square? Why these particular people? Why these particular people that I see on this day?" Well, they are hungry, but not for tourist hamburgers. They are seeking and they are hoping.

A few months ago I recall running my hands through thousands of letters at Church headquarters. Over ninety thousand had been received, requesting a little pamphlet we had offered to those wanting information about how to help their families. Millions in the United States had watched a television program about family life. We offered some solutions and the phones started to ring from all over America. Parents phoned, or took time to write. And as I picked up those letters from the bags full I noticed that most read, "Please send me the booklet that you offer. If you can help my family, please send it." Others read, "My family needs help." Many people were asking for answers to their questions and concerns.

Other people are now wandering around on Temple Square looking for answers. Deep in their hearts they must feel that something is missing. They must feel that we have answers to their concerns.

During my visit to Temple Square that other morning, I walked over to four large stone tablets that are placed in an unusual setting. I hope sometime you take time to read them. Read them slowly, carefully, thoughtfully. The first one is "The Law." Words chiseled in the stone—words the Lord himself wrote in stone with his finger for Moses to show and teach the children of Israel—these are the great governing principles by which all mortal men are judged, by which we will all be judged. These commandments are still part of the basic law governing mankind. You will read on the first table, as you stand there and admire this setting,

#### *The Law*

*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*

*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.*

*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.*

*Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.*

*Honor thy father and mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*

*Thou shalt not kill.*

*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

*Thou shalt not steal.*

*Thou shalt not bear false witness . . .*

*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house . . . thy neighbor's wife . . . nor anything that is thy neighbor's.*

After reading this clear warning of the pitfalls that we must avoid at all costs, I then moved over and read the last stone, on which are carved the firm, gentle words of the Savior, and which is entitled "The Way." From John,

fourteenth chapter, sixth verse: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Then from Matthew, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22: 37–39). Then from the seventh chapter of Matthew, twelfth verse: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." And then the last one on that stone from the 84th section of the Doctrine and Covenants: "Give diligent heed to the words of eternal life. For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God."

There are many phases of our Lord's teachings that we might mention here tonight, but if you could only resolve to build into your life's purpose a commitment to live fully and completely the Ten Commandments as well as "the Way" as quoted from the New Testament, then I would remind you that your life would be rich and meaningful and happy. You wonderful young people who mean so much to the Lord, and whom the Lord needs so much in this great challenge we have to carry this message of hope and salvation to all the world, must not be among those who flaunt the Lord's commandments, particularly the commandments regarding sex sin. It is destroying more lives and breaking more homes and families than ever in the history of man. It is the curse of our civilization. Sexual immorality stands next to murder in the category of personal crimes. It is the "most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost," wrote Alma (Alma 39:5). And as the world becomes more wicked, you who have been raised and taught and guided as you have will lead people unto Christ by your faithfulness, by your example of being pure and clean before the Lord. Do not deny yourselves rich blessings by violating

God's laws. They are for a purpose, for your good, for your spiritual blessings, for your salvation.

Now, my dear young friends, you may feel at times that the Lord's commandments restrict your freedom as compared with that of other people. Freedom does not mean license, nor does it imply the absence of all restrictions and discipline. The savior did not teach undisciplined, permissive-type freedom. When he said, "Know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32), he was telling us that his truth if followed will free us from falsity and from deception, and that his gospel if followed will free us to gain eternal life. You must be strong and influence those who are weak, for the Savior taught us to be the salt of the earth and not to lose our savor (see Matthew 5:13; Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34–35).

Some time ago a high school senior and student body leader was asked about his relationship to his peer group. This young man said, "I find great strength in the example of my peers. To get up and walk out of an offensive movie, to stand up and defend or even befriend a person whom everyone else ridicules, to be the only one in the crowd to say no to drinking, dishonesty, breaking the Sabbath day—all of these actions take a person of strong character. Such people among my friends have given immeasurable courage to me and to others."

He continued, "I remember a night when some friends and I sneaked into a movie through the exit without paying. We were laughing and feeling smart and smug about it when, without a word, one of my friends got up and left the theater. Suddenly, being dishonest didn't seem funny any more. One by one each of us walked out each secretly wishing we had had that much courage."

This young man went on to say, "Probably the most well-respected boy I know is a young man who makes friends with all kinds of people, regardless of their belief or status. He is

loved among Church members and classmates. He is always the life of the party and a fun date, yet he has never lowered his high standards in any way to win a friend or to get a laugh. He gravitates naturally toward positions of leadership because his peers, even the weakest ones, sense his strength of character. He has changed the lives of many young people."

One of the great powers in the world is that of example. People need a model to see and at times to lean on. Henry David Thoreau wrote: "If you would convince a man that he does wrong, do right. Men will believe what they see." Such an example is the story of Mervyn Sharp Bennion; I would like to take just a few moments to tell you about it.

Mervyn Sharp Bennion, who became one of the renowned heroes of World War II, was born in the small village of Vernon near Tooele, Utah. He grew up in a faithful Latter-day Saint home and was taught by his parents and according to the scriptures the principles of faith, reverence, respect and regard for others, confidence in himself, a strong sense of right and wrong, and an understanding of the full measure of his purpose of life. Because of his excellent reading ability as a result of studying the Bible as a small boy, he became an outstanding student. He attended school in a one-room log schoolhouse in Vernon; there were usually thirty or more pupils in all grades from the first to the eighth, ages six to twenty-five, with one teacher in the one-room schoolhouse. There was little time for instruction, but they were taught the attributes of a good character and wholesome habits, and they developed their personalities in this one-room schoolhouse with plays and programs in which everyone participated.

Near the close of his high schooling, Mervyn Bennion took a competitive examination and was admitted to the Annapolis Naval Academy. There he continued his character and personality development, resulting in his being number one in his class for the first three years;

however, in his fourth year, he dropped back to third in his class because he was tutoring as free service some of the other midshipmen who were having difficulties. He was a sought-out companion and developed all the wonderful attributes of an outstanding young man, this product of a humble Mormon home and a one-room schoolhouse. Upon graduation from Annapolis he was awarded the sword offered every year by the Daughters of the American Revolution for excellence.

Mervyn Bennion continued through the usual duty assignments of a young naval officer, growing in stature and ability and always living close to the Lord. He married Louise Clark, the eldest daughter of President J. Reuben Clark. They had one child, Mervyn, Junior. In his various naval assignments he was called to be Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance in Washington, D.C., a distinguished position. This was after he had commanded a number of ships.

Even though he would be on duty assignment for only a brief period, he was always active in the Church and would always seek out a little branch of the Church somewhere in the world and attend the meetings. But while living in Washington he became a counselor in the branch presidency and later in the first bishopric of the Chevy Chase Ward. They needed priesthood leaders in those early days; they were particularly short of priesthood home teachers, and even though Mervyn was heavily involved at the Navy headquarters, he was completely devoted to his Church calling with all of the time available. As an example, he had thirty home teaching families to visit and made it a point to visit each one every month. Everyone who came in contact with Mervyn Bennion in the Church or in the Navy felt of his great spirit and devotion, because he knew so well his purpose in life and his responsibility.

His last assignment was as the commanding officer of one of the Navy's largest

battleships stationed in Hawaii, the U.S.S. *West Virginia*. Our country was then at peace. Commanding officers of large ships usually had free time for social life and personal affairs; however, Captain Bennion, because of his dedication and love of his country and his built-in desire to serve well and faithfully, was careful with the use of his time. As an example, on December 6, 1941, a Saturday, Captain Bennion was invited to have dinner in the Honolulu home of President and Sister Ralph Woolley, then president of the Oahu Stake. After a pleasant evening, the Woolleys suggested that Captain Bennion stay overnight and go to Sunday School with them the next morning. But he said that his place was on his ship.

The following morning, Sunday, December 7, 1941, at a few minutes before eight o'clock, Captain Bennion was in his cabin shaving, preparing to leave the ship to go to Sunday School and fast meeting in Honolulu, when a sailor on watch from the bridge dashed in to report a Japanese air attack approaching. Captain Bennion instantly gave the command, "Air attack! To your battle stations!" Then he ran to his own, the conning tower on the flag bridge.

In a few minutes torpedo planes flew in close, letting go torpedoes that struck the U.S.S. *West Virginia* in rapid succession. Almost immediately bombers flew overhead and hit the U.S.S. *West Virginia*. Captain Bennion, anxious to see what had happened to his ship, stepped out the door of the conning tower; he had scarcely taken two steps when he was hit by a splinter from a bomb. This splinter tore into his body, and a fragment hit his spine and his left hip. He fell to the floor. Instantly his plight was observed and the pharmacist's mate came to place a bandage over his abdomen and to try to ease the pain, but it was clear to him and undoubtedly to Captain Bennion that the wound was beyond any hope of mending,

though the captain did not say a word to indicate that he knew of this serious condition.

As soon as the wound was given the simplest of dressing, Captain Bennion sent the man below to work with the wounded and refused to be attended further while there was work to be done for others. As men and officers came to him, he briefly asked what was transpiring and gave orders and instructions to meet the conditions as they arose. Only two lives were lost from that ship's complement that morning: Captain Bennion and one seaman. The wounded were attended to promptly and evacuated from the ship with dispatch.

Captain Bennion was courageous and cheerful. His spirit was reflected in the conduct of his crew. He resisted all efforts to remove him from the bridge with a firmness and vigor that astonished his officers. He talked only of the ship and the men, how the fight was going, what guns were out of action, how to get them in operation again, who was wounded, what care the wounded were receiving, and how to evacuate them from the ship.

At about nine-thirty a.m. fire broke out, cutting off the escape of Captain Bennion and two others. The officers tied him onto a ladder and tried to lift him out, and with some great difficulty and with the ship on fire they carried him up to a navigation bridge to a corner at the rear that seemed to be free from smoke. But Captain Bennion told them to leave him and to save themselves if it were possible. They made him as comfortable as they could.

On the battleship alongside, most of Captain Bennion's men watched the lone, whiteclad figure lying on the navigation bridge of the ship. A young ensign, Delano, deeply touched by Captain Bennion and deeply attached to him, watched for hours. He said that twice in the first half-hour after Captain Bennion was left alone he saw him stir, rise up on his elbows, look about, and then drop back. The grandeur of this heroic death scene as it unfolded profoundly moved the men of the

stricken fleet, and the executive officer of the ship wrote,

*“Be assured, Mrs. Bennion, that every person in the West Virginia shares your grief. We are all proud to have served under Captain Bennion and his kindness, cheerfulness and courage will always be remembered by all of us who had the privilege and pleasure of being under his command.” . . .*

*Thus closed in glorious death a naval career without fault or blemish.* [Howard S. Bennion, *Mervyn Sharp Bennion: One of the Lord’s Noblemen*, p. 19; hereinafter cited as *Bennion*]

The following morning, when the superstructure had cooled off sufficiently to permit, Captain Bennion’s body was removed from the ship. The spot where he lay had been untouched by fire. Some remarked that he was protected from the fire because he wore a special type of underwear.

The president of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, at that time posthumously awarded Captain Bennion the Congressional Medal of Honor. A camp in the Farragut Naval Training Station in northern Idaho was named Camp Bennion. On July 4, 1943, a destroyer launched at the Boston Navy Yard was christened the U.S.S. Bennion by Louise Clark Bennion. Admiral David Sellers wrote to Sister Bennion, “His complete unforgetfulness of self and devotion to duty to the last has set an example that will serve as an inspiration in years to come to the officers and men of the United States Navy” (quoted in *Bennion*, p. 20). His dying conduct is now cited in naval training classes as one of the outstanding examples to be found in all United States naval history.

“The most important of all his characteristics was his constant and sincere desire to keep the commandments of God,” wrote his bishop. “He did not think of himself overly righteous, but his sincerity and his ever present desire to live in accordance with God’s laws and to perform the full duty required of him, impressed

all who knew him” (quoted in *Bennion*, p. 20). His characteristics, his purpose, his desire, his faith, his conduct were steadfastly the same. Of course, he had grown in stature and in influence, but inherently he was unchanged. He was started out on the right path by his parents in a little Mormon town, and he kept going straight ahead, his purpose clearly identified. He influenced many, many lives for good. He was a great and devoted member of this Church. We honor his name, his family, and his good works.

Each of us has been given a lamp to carry. Your lamp will light the way for you and hopefully for others, but it must have oil. Oil for your lamp will not come from the good works or the righteousness of your parents or friends; but from your faithfulness in keeping the commandments of God; from your actions and desires and, of course, your love of the Master. The psalmist wrote:

*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;*

*What is man, that thou are mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

*For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor . . .*

*O Lord our Lord, [the psalmist concluded,] how excellent is thy name in all the earth! [Psalm 8:3–5, 9]*

To you, my dear young friends, as one of those called to be a special witness to you and to all the world, I testify in all solemnity that I know that God lives, that he is real, that he is our Father. President Kimball and his counselors and all the Twelve ordained me an apostle in the temple a little over a year ago; they left me alone after this sacred occasion and I had the opportunity to be all alone in that upper room in the temple, to get on my knees and to pour out my heart and soul to my

Heavenly Father. I had an event happen to me at that time that I may testify and witness to you that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that he lives—*that he lives*—that he is real; that this is the church of Jesus Christ restored to the earth in these latter days; and that Spencer Woolley Kimball is a prophet of God, a living prophet here upon the earth now for you to see, to listen to, to read what he says, to follow the direction that he gives to you as the living prophet who understands your challenges. I bear my witness to you that these things are true, for the witness is mine.

I leave you my love and my blessing and my hope and desire that each of you will somehow sense your responsibility in this great scheme, that you will not fall victim to the things that are going on in the world, but that you will be able to stand up tall and straight and look the world straight in the eye unblemished, unscarred, and unspotted, to become servants of the Lord and of mankind. I leave you my witness and my blessing in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.