

Fuller Understanding

MARION D. HANKS

For you who were in a meeting where I spoke last week in the stake conferences here, I will in comfort and patience quote the words of Ambrose Bierce who was defining the word *twice* as “Once too many.” And I will also quote the words of Dr. Edward Hashimoto the morning after Pearl Harbor. He was a professor at the University of Utah Medical School and a delightful and marvelous human being of Japanese Ancestry. You may recall what happened at Pearl Harbor on a certain Sunday morning. On Monday morning Dr. Hashimoto faced his class in absolute silence, looked slowly around, and then said, “Don’t look at me. I’m Irish.”

Well, I have come as bidden, delighted to be invited and hopeful that I may be useful—in some way an instrument in the Lord’s hands this morning. I had two or three delightful hours reading scriptures last night and incidentally noting some ideas. I thought with a smile to myself this morning, not knowing exactly what I’m going to serve you, about my dear friend with a large family whose wife is a very sweet, wonderful, and perhaps over-sensitive person. She was serving her large family soup one night and had just begun to put the bowls on the table—having served the littlest people first—when the doorbell rang. She quickly snatched back the bowls already served and

put them away while the visitor was ushered in. Just before the visitor departed, the littlest boy, looking with some bewilderment at what had lately been and no longer was before him, said, “Daddy, have we already *aten*?”

I feel as if I’ve already “aten.” I’ve had the advantage of feasting on the most important words in the world for several hours. Lacking some specific direction, I just read, and that was really fun. I commend it to you. I thought of two other little incidents that seem relevant and not just stories to be told.

A major financial institution in Salt Lake City has just completed the refurbishment of their original small building on the corner of First South and Main Street and the modernization of the old clock that has stood out there for years, once run by water power, now of course by more modern means. A man was on a tall ladder working on that clock while people walked by him. Apparently a good many asked if he was fixing the clock. Finally he said to one who inquired: “No, I’m near-sighted.”

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The other story is about the boy who was having trouble with mathematics. The teacher, anxious to help him, brought some physical objects and said to him, “Now, Tom, if I have ten apples and I take five away, what’s the difference?” He said, “That’s how I feel about it, teacher, what’s the difference?”

Importance of One Day

Among the wonderful ideas I was blessed to run across last night, some of which I’m going to share with you, is this page with three or four short paragraphs to which I ask you to listen with interest because it’s worth it. From David Grayson, a favorite and beloved friend, whom I know through his books, I read:

This is a well earned Sunday morning. My chores were all done long ago, and I am sitting down here after a late and leisurely breakfast with that luxurious feeling of irresponsible restfulness and comfort which comes only upon a clean, still Sunday morning like this—after a week of hard work—a clean Sunday morning with clean clothes, and a clean chin, and clean thoughts, and the June airs stirring the clean white curtains of my windows. From across the hills I can hear very faintly the drowsy sounds of early church bells, never, indeed, to be heard here except on a morning of surpassing tranquility. And in a barnyard back of the house Harriet’s hens are cackling triumphantly. They are impiously unobservant of the Sabbath Day.

I turned out my mare for a run in the pasture. She has rolled herself again and again in the warm earth and shaken herself after each roll with an equine delight more pleasant to see. Now, from time to time, I can hear her gossipy whickerings as she calls across the field to my neighbor Horace’s young bay colts.

When I first woke up this morning I said to myself:

“Well, nothing happened yesterday.”

Then I lay quiet for some time—it being Sunday morning—and I turned over in my mind all that I had heard or seen or felt or thought about in that one day, and presently I said aloud to myself:

“Why, nearly everything happened yesterday.”

*And the more I thought of it the more interesting, the more wonderful, the more explanatory of high things appeared the common doings of that June Saturday. I had walked among unusual events—and had not known the wonder of them! I had eyes, but I did not see—and ears, but I heard not. It may be, it may be, that the Future Life of which we have had such confusing but wistful prophecy is only the reliving with a full understanding of this marvelous life that we now know. To a full understanding this day, this moment even—here in this quiet room—would contain enough to crowd an eternity. Oh, we are children yet—playing with things much too large for us—much too full of meaning. [Baker, Ray S., *Adventures in Friendship*, by David Grayson (pseud.) (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1910), pp. 173–75]*

Last night at midnight, having done my reading and thinking and praying, I took this pad and single-spaced on it events that had happened during the day. It had been an uneventful day, a day which was supposed to be a kind of a catch-up day, a preparing day for a full week and what is to follow, a think day, a put-together day, a day for refurbishment in a sense, a day of quietness, maybe even a day at home. But when I had noted all that occurred, in the spirit of Grayson’s motivating thoughts, I had a long list of exciting and important events to remember and consider.

Let me mention only one. A neighbor from across the street knocked on the door in the evening with a very apologetic look on her face and said, “My sister was using our telephone, or I would have called first, Mr. Hanks. Do you have an egg we could borrow?”

I invited her into the kitchen and showed her our vast wealth in eggs. We had a dozen and three. I said, "Will you take the dozen or the three?"

She said, "We only need one."

I said, "Well, you can't leave here with only one." So I gave her the box with the three, took her to the door, and sent her on her way, smiling and happy, to go home and tell her mother that she had three eggs. I can almost imagine the conversation. "But I sent you for one," and all the rest.

Do you know how exciting that is? These great people are here from Taiwan. Their daddy is a professor at the university. They are a wonderful family, and I had the great blessing of sending her home with three eggs. One day she will replace the eggs, and our friendship will be firmer and better.

I met Bob Cundick on his way out of the temple. He has his index finger broken and in a cast. You students know who Dr. Cundick is? He plays the tabernacle organ. I said to him, "How could anybody be so dumb as to break his first finger when he is an organist?" We laughed, he told me about it, and I went on my way.

Well, out of all of this, what happened in that uneventful day when nothing happened—when, in fact, everything happened? I've been thinking about the *fuller understanding* that will come and that may amount, as David Grayson said, to what heaven really is. Out of it came a couple of ideas I'd like to share. What is this fuller understanding? What are the principles which will become far more significant in that "Future Life" of which Grayson spoke? I believe that there are three fundamental elements in life that need to be thought about.

1. Foundational Principles of God's Plan

One is the foundational principles, that body of truth which constitutes the reality, the revelation, of that which is real and true, has been, is, and ever will be; the truth about

God and about Christ and about man and about life and eternity; the truth about those fundamentals that constitute God's plan. Are these things important to know? The answer in the scripture is that they mean life eternal, to know God and his holy Son. They not only mean life eternal; they mean life worthwhile, life harmonious, life constructive, life sweet, life beautiful, life contributing, life lovely, life progressive. Yes, these things are the beginning, and I won't try to rehearse for you the meaning of all of them, but let's note some examples.

Rufus Jones, the great Quaker teacher and mystic, with whom I fell in love when I first read the first thing I found that he had written, said about the Almighty and why it's important to know him:

Vital religion cannot be maintained and preserved on the theory that God dealt with our human race only in the far past ages and that the Bible is the only evidence we have that our God is a living, revealing, communicating God. If God ever spoke, He is still speaking. He is the great I am, not the great he was. ["A Flash of Eternity," newspaper article]

Last week from a wonderful Methodist friend, who serves in Scouting and whom I came to admire and love greatly in that worthy endeavor, there came a note sharing some good things that have happened to him. One of them was that he had met a young man who had been one of his Scouts. The man obviously was in some distress, and Brother Dyke, as he spoke with him, discovered that he had lost his wife in a tragic way. He had little children, and this loss had almost destroyed him. They had stayed with his mother during the last stages of the terrible illness, but then had to go home to their little apartment—and how he dreaded that. They ate TV dinners and watched television until too late. The little girl fell asleep, and he carried her to bed. When he returned, his son said, "Daddy,

tonight, just tonight, could I sleep with you?" The two of them went into the bedroom and lay there in the dark, neither sleeping.

In the darkness, Bill said, his son spoke, "Daddy, are you looking at me?"

He said, "Yes, son, I'm looking at you."

The little boy said, "Okay." He snuggled his little body tight into the small of his daddy's back and went to sleep.

Bill said, "Mr. Dyke, I don't believe I've ever felt so alone. I looked out the window, and I said out loud, 'God, O God, if you're looking at me, and you know my need, I can make it.'"

There is more in this wonderful letter from a dear friend, who is one example of many that reinforce my certain conviction that deep in the hearts of good men there is a simple and beautiful comprehension of a real, revealing, communicating, living Father. Of Christ we say the same: our Savior, our Lord, our Master, our *living* Head.

I love maybe as much as anything I've learned in years what Karl Barth, the great theologian, is said to have replied when he was asked—he who had filled a library with his own books and was a magnificent mind and human being—if he could summarize what he had learned. This is how he answered, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." That is what Karl Barth said he had learned in a lifetime, the most important thing he had learned in a lifetime: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

2. What Man Is

The second element is man. Oh, what an exciting, wonderful thing to contemplate what man is! I've always loved the marvelous Jewish comedian, teacher, and human being whose name was Sam Levenson. Maybe you know him. I hope you do. He talked once about going to a psychiatrist and paying a whole lot of money. Then, finally, he thought it over and said to himself, "What am I doing here? What

is this fellow doing for me? What is he helping me with for fifty or one hundred dollars an hour? Really all he is doing is asking me the same question my father asked me all my life, 'Who do you think you are, anyway?'

Who do we think we are? Let me tell you in a word what Socrates said, "Self-knowledge is the kind of knowledge required for one to become an ethical being. The ignorance which causes vice and immorality is not ignorance of moral principles or laws, but an ignorance of one's own self" (quoted by Earl Nightingale, Program 4366). Kierkegaard said, "There is nothing of which every man is so afraid as of getting to know how enormously much he is capable of doing and becoming." They are saying what we surely know, that we are children of God. A man commenting on this concluded a brief radio address this way. I beg you to listen: "When you drive by those porno stalls and see those people lined up for the sick movies and so on, remember the words of Socrates, 'The ignorance which causes vice and immorality is not ignorance of moral principles or laws, but an ignorance of one's own self.'"

There are things that children of God just should not do, that they should not accept, that they should never contribute to. The *they* is the *we*, we who are, among other things, divine by origin and potential. We are also neighbors and family members with everybody else. We are also unique persons with a responsibility to find and develop those talents that are special, those gifts that are uniquely ours.

Life is purposeful, a schoolground, not a playground. In the eternities there is a better world where there is no more sorrow and there are no more tears. The plan is a more excellent way. I wish we could talk about that. They are the fundamental things, I believe, which we need to have—foundational to what else? What else is there? There are two groups of people who aren't very happy here and cannot

be and won't be hereafter: "Such as have and do not spend, and such as know and do not act." It is not enough to know. The prophet taught us, "Now, if ye believe all these things, see that ye do them" (Mosiah 4:10). In the words of Jesus are the instructions we need. We are also taught out of a source to which Brother Holland referred, "If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do [or to be done], chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces" (W. Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, act 1, scene 2, line 13). The great poet is telling us that it is easier to know than to do.

I read aboard an airplane on my last trip to the Orient a few weeks ago something I've thought a lot about since: Jack Curtice, the former football coach at the University of Utah, died in California. He had gone to Stanford from Utah and then to a smaller school. Jack Curtice was a good coach. What touched me and made me shed a tear on that airplane—because I knew him too—was the enterprising and inspiring response of his athletes fifteen or twenty years later to this coach. They remembered whether they won or lost, I guess, but nobody mentioned it. They talked about the fairness, the humor, the humanity, the decency, the integrity, the honesty and honor of Jack Curtice. They talked about the way he treated them, and they shed tears—men of prominence and accomplishment, men in the army and business and the legal field and elsewhere—all responding when their old coach died. I marveled at these sincere and merited tributes.

In that same newspaper I read the account of "Mercury" Morris. Does the name mean anything to this generation? He was all-pro for many years for the Miami Dolphins and then San Diego. "Mercury" Morris, the great runner, a college graduate, bright enough to do a lot of worthwhile things. He had been arrested with \$250,000 of cocaine on his table and \$124,000 in cash. He was charged with

and was last week convicted of a series of crimes that will, or could, put him in prison for many years. He will go to prison for at least fifteen years, with no possibility of parole. It said he left the courtroom weeping, with a white Bible in his hand.

Jack Curtice and "Mercury" Morris. Well, there is nothing, nothing more true than that we are God's children and have been given a chance to have a vision of what it is he wants. I love this thirtieth chapter of Deuteronomy, where we are taught by the great prophet that it isn't all that hard. Listen to what he says:

For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.

It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. [Deuteronomy 30:11–14]

Then he teaches the central principle of all of that:

See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;

. . . blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days. [Deuteronomy 30:15, 19–20]

Oh, there are so many marvelous things in the scriptures. We are children of God, and we are brothers and sisters, and we are neighbors. We have the blessing and inescapable responsibility of deciding what we are going to do about that.

3. Testimony

Then there is a third and final thing about which I would like to speak a moment. We need to know these foundational truths, and I'm sure you can't just intuit them, although they are born within us, and the process is more peeling away than it is planting, I believe. We need to need to learn those truths through asking, seeking, knocking, through study, through effort. Missionaries come back and want to know why it is different and why they don't have the same feeling when they want the same feeling. The answer is obvious: the Lord has given it, feast upon the words of Christ and those other marvelous instructions in chapter 31 of 2 Nephi; pray and serve and stay close and keep your mind away from the dirt and the filth.

When we know and act, I believe the third fundamental is to have this blessing called testimony, or the witness that the Spirit brings. I thought and thought and had a hundred examples and am going to use the simple one of the bishop in Taiwan. Some of you will have been there and may know the bishop in Taipei. He had to leave the mainland of China with the defeated armies thirty years or so ago. He has been there thirty years, totally out of communication with his wonderful wife and his children, unable to write, unable to let her know or her him of present things. He joined the Church a few years ago. He has been a marvelous, strong, unselfish bishop for a number of years. I keep thinking about him. What gives a man enough hope, enough faith, enough endurance, to put up with that when most of us scarce stand a day or a week or a month away from those we love the best? There is something that strengthens us, that testifies this is true and that motivates us to move in this way.

Conclusion

As I conclude, I want to share with you two other examples of a combination of these

three. One is a letter that came in Hong Kong from a family that I had never met:

Dear Elder Hanks,

In an effort to make our family Christmas more meaningful we decided together to economize and use the savings to feed the hungry children in Cambodia. Examples of what our children have done to earn money are to address envelopes for my work, sell stationery, work around the yard and house. The kids earned a penny a page for reading; they used the money they were going to spend buying presents for each other and put it into this account. They have given up a trip and goodies. We bought a smaller size Christmas tree that would sit up on top of the table rather than a full-size tree and are giving the difference. In all, the enclosed check represents on behalf of our family money that we would have spent on Christmas but did not. We know that you will put it to good use. We are grateful for our many blessings, sorry that there are so many who suffer so much. Please let us know what else we can do. Have a Merry Christmas.

And I did have and I know that they did have.

Let me leave ringing in your ears, I hope, what a refugee said to one of the beautiful ladies who is now a teacher at this university and was an outstanding person as others are here. I wish I could name them all, but that would be impossible and perhaps inappropriate. They put on a Christmas program for the refugees. I'm not going to try to pull your heartstrings and tell you what it is like in a refugee camp. There is no possible way. These people, devoid of everything, everything that we think of as important, with terrible memories, imposed upon viciously, incredibly, unbelievably by others, now gathered inside a fence or a wall hoping that sometime, someplace there will be a home for them beyond these six feet on a pallet which is home now. They had Christmas the way we celebrate it with one of our beautiful girls representing the Madonna, holding a little brown baby. They

told the story, our great young ladies did, in song, in scripture, and explanation, and when it was all over, some came to talk about it, and one said with tears and wonder in her face and voice, "Why, the story of Jesus is a refugee story."

Fill that in. Please let your imagination run. Then she said, "I'm sure they didn't know who

he was, or they would have given him their bed in the inn."

We know who he was. God bless us to be what we ought to be and thus through that Spirit learn what we need to know and grow so that we may never be among such as have and do not spend, or such as know and do not act. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.