

The Widow's Mite

GORDON B. HINCKLEY

It is a great opportunity and a great privilege to be with you this beautiful morning. I appreciate the effort you have made to gather here. It has been the custom, reaching back many years, for a member of the First Presidency to speak to you at the beginning of a new school year. I would very much like to say something that will be helpful to all, and to this end I have prayed for the direction of the Holy Spirit.

I bring you the love and greetings of President Kimball and President Romney. President Kimball serves not only as president of the Church but also as chairman of the board of trustees of this university, and President Romney serves as a vice chairman. I am confident they would have enjoyed being with you this morning, had circumstances permitted. As you are aware, President Kimball is now in his ninetieth year and, because of the infirmities of age, he is unable to get out and speak as he once did with such vigor. President Romney is similarly handicapped.

I wish to share with you some of my concerns in the responsibility that has been thrust upon me. I want you to bear some of that responsibility. If you are a member of the Church, you too have a challenge to be concerned with its strength and growth.

I remember many years ago when a man, both prominent and well-to-do, came to see Stephen L Richards, who was then a member of the First Presidency. The man had a son who was denied a missionary call because of his moral misbehavior. The man was very forceful, almost demanding, in his request that the son be permitted to go. At the time I had responsibility for the missionary program of the Church and was in the room when the conversation took place. After the man had finished his lengthy and demanding argument, President Richards said, "Brother, I have some responsibility for the affairs of this Church. You do also. If you were seated where I sit, knowing the circumstances that I know, you would feel exactly as I do. Now, in your position as a member of this Church, as one who holds the priesthood, you too have responsibility for its growth and program, and for its discipline. My heart goes out to you, for I know that what you say comes of love for your son. However, I am asking you, as a man with a responsibility for

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the progress of the Church, to look at the larger affairs of the kingdom. Then you make the decision in that light.” After a thoughtful silence, it was the father who made the decision that his son should not go.

The Lord’s Law of Finance

It has now been more than four years since I was called into the Presidency. For two and a half of those four years, not of my own wish, I have had thrust upon me the burden of the day-to-day work of the office of the Presidency. Please do not misunderstand me. I am not complaining. I have been blessed by the Lord in a marvelous and wonderful way. I have been blessed with the confidence of his chosen servants, Presidents Kimball and Romney. I have been blessed with the loyalty, the unflagging devotion, and the help of the Council of the Twelve, of each member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, of the Presiding Bishopric, and of the membership of the Church across the world. I have been remembered in many prayers, and I am grateful beyond power of expression.

Incident to the responsibility that I have, I have chaired the meetings of the board of trustees of this university. For many years I have served as chairman of the executive committee of the board.

I also chair the meetings of the Budget and Appropriations Committee of the Church. This is a very serious responsibility.

As you are aware, on July 8, 1838, the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith the law of tithing as it applies to the members of the Church in this dispensation.

On that same day, he gave a revelation in which he said that the tithing funds of the Church should be “disposed of by a council, composed of the First Presidency of my Church, and of the bishop and his council, and by my high council” (D&C 120).

Based on that revelation, we have in the Church what we call the Council on the

Disposition of the Tithes. This council is composed of the First Presidency, the Council of the Twelve, and the Presiding Bishopric. Theirs is the ultimate responsibility for all Church expenditures.

Serving, in effect, as an executive committee of that council, we have what we designate the Budget and Appropriations Committee. This committee meets weekly to consider for approval all items of Church expenditure. These might include a score or more of new chapels in various places throughout the world, or a building or renovation project on the BYU campus, a new temple somewhere, or any number of things. I need not tell you that with hundreds of buildings under construction (more than 900 at this time), the number of dollars involved is enormous. Again, it is my responsibility to chair these meetings and to sign the approvals for the expenditures. It is a worrisome responsibility.

Where does the money come from? There are many who look upon the Church as an organization of great wealth. We have been classified as being equal to many institutions of the Fortune 500. Our assets are spoken of glibly by those who either do not know the facts, or with gross distortion for purposes of sensationalism.

The fact, of course, is that we do have tremendous assets when the value of all Church buildings and facilities is included. But these assets are not income producing. They are consumers. They consist of thousands of meetinghouses across the world, many temples, seminaries and institutes, and, of course, Brigham Young University. They have cost millions in investments, and they produce scarcely anything in the way of a direct dollar return on those investments. There is only one reason for their existence, and that is to serve the needs of *people* as sons and daughters of God who have a peculiar and important relationship with him.

I repeat that the Church is frequently spoken of as an institution of great wealth. When all is said and done, the Church is wealthy only in the faith of its people. One of the expressions of that faith is the payment of tithing. The Church is spoken of as an institution with great business interests. The income from those business properties would keep the Church going for only a very short time. The fact is that tithing is the Lord's law of finance. It came of revelation from him. It is a divine law with a great and beautiful promise. It is applicable to every member of the Church who has income. It is applicable to the widow in her poverty as well as to the wealthy man in his riches. It is simple of understanding. One need only compare it with the income tax to recognize the simplicity that comes of the wisdom of God in contrast with the complexity that comes of the wisdom of men.

The Widow's Mite

I hold in my hand a widow's mite. It was given me in Jerusalem many years ago, and I was told that it is genuine. I have it framed, and I keep it in my office as a constant reminder of the fearsome responsibility of spending that which comes of the consecrations of the members of the Church. Most of the wonderful, faithful Latter-day Saints who pay their tithing are men and women of modest means. They not only pay their tithing, but they also make many other contributions for the strengthening of this work.

Some time back a small, bent, elderly woman came to my office. For the purpose of this talk I shall call her Mary Olsen, although that is not her name and she would not wish her identity disclosed. She said she had just come over from the temple. She took from her purse her checkbook. She said that she had been a widow for many years, that life had not been easy for her. She had a great love for the Lord and his Church. She had faithfully paid her tithing all her life. She felt she would not

live much longer. Now, she said, she felt she ought to be doing more to help than she had done. In a hand shaky with age, she wrote a check for \$5,000. She handed it to me. I noted the address where she lived. It was in a poor neighborhood. I confess that as I looked at that check tears came into my eyes. I have held many larger checks than that in my hands. But as I held the check of this widow woman, I was almost overcome by her faith and the seriousness of the trust that was mine in the expenditure of her consecrated contribution.

My dear young friends, we—you and I—are trustees of that which has been given to the Lord by Mary Olsen and thousands like her whose devotion is as great and whose sacrifice is as certain. This beautiful campus, with its many programs, is a consumer of a very substantial portion of the widow's contribution. She gives her offering to the Lord, and she is then released from responsibility. The responsibility then becomes mine—and yours!

What might she expect of you? I am going to talk quickly of four or five things that I think she might appropriately expect.

First, I think she might expect on your part a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation. I recognize that the fees you spend to attend BYU are high and sometimes difficult to pay. But you should know that several times the amount you pay comes from the sacred funds of the Church to cover the actual cost of your presence on this campus. That applies to every one of you who is here. You are truly privileged. There are approximately 26,000 of you. There are literally legions of other worthy young men and women who are members of the Church who would do almost anything to be here. Why should you be so treated when a beautiful and brilliant girl in the British Isles, or that qualified young man in Argentina, or that able and faithful girl in Japan, are just as worthy and just as eligible as you?

Gratitude is among the greatest of virtues. I hope there is not a day that passes that you

do not get on your knees and thank the Lord for the marvelous privileges you have in attending this university. Where in the world is there a more beautiful campus than this? Where are there better facilities? Where is there a better-qualified faculty of men and women not only of learning, but also of faith? Where will you find better associations than here? (I might add, parenthetically, where will you find a football team more worthy of cheering about?)

I know the academic grind is hard. I know you sometimes get discouraged as you face it. I know that for many of you there is acute loneliness even with so many around you. I may say, however, that you would have these problems and more at any other university. Be thankful. Be appreciative of the marvelous opportunity you have to study at this magnificent university.

Second, the widow who brought to me her offering, which has become a portion of the funding of this university, would expect you to save, protect, and do all you can to preserve these remarkable facilities that have cost so much. We constantly receive requests from people across the world to establish another university in one place or another. It would be a wonderful thing if we could do so. However, we must face the fact that it would be too expensive, more than we could afford, to build and maintain such a plant and faculty. It is your home while you are here. Take good care of it. I am appalled when I see property defaced, or vandalized, or damaged through carelessness, or resources wasted. There must never be such on this campus. It was built to its present state in large measure by money from the tithes of the Church. It is maintained in large measure by such funds. Take care of it. A sacred trust is placed in you to do so.

Third, the widow of whom I speak expects that while you are here you will experience an increase in faith and a strengthened knowledge

of the things of God, and, more particularly, of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

Each of you is expected to take courses in religion. Some may resent that. I hope not. These courses, taught by qualified instructors, represent one of the major differences between this and other universities. You have opportunities here that you would not have in any other school in quite the same measure. Do not resent these studies. Dig in and drink up that which is offered for your enlightenment and the strengthening of your testimony. Most of you will never again have such an opportunity as you will have here to learn the gospel in an environment of scholarship. Drink deeply of eternal truths.

Fourth, another great expectation is that many of you will find your companions here. Generally speaking there is no better place to find one of your own kind, with the same standards, the same ambitions, the same desire and willingness to serve the Lord as you go forward with your lives. It is expected that a marriage arising out of associations on this campus will be a marriage based on love, appreciation, and mutual respect, with an understanding of the heavy responsibilities as well as the potential for happiness in time and throughout eternity, through the exercise of the priesthood in the house of the Lord.

In anticipation of that, you can never be immoral. You cannot be dishonest in courting or in marriage without violating the great trust that is placed in you as a student of Brigham Young University.

Fifth, the final great expectation in terms of your presence here is that you will better qualify yourselves to fill positions of responsibility in the world of which you will become a part. All of us are tremendously proud of BYU's great football accomplishments. They redound to the honor of the school. They reflect good to the Church. We are proud of the team and wish for them continued success.

However, the primary purpose of BYU is not football. The primary purpose of BYU is to provide a first-class education in the disciplines and skills that will qualify you for productive lives while at the same time inculcating within you a solid foundation of spiritual values.

You will violate a sacred trust with the widow woman I mentioned, and with all of us, if you fail to take advantage of the great opportunity that is yours here to learn in order that you might go forth to serve.

That service must be given with integrity. There can be no cheating in the halls of learning without consequent impact on one's fitness to serve in the world of work. If we turn out lawyers with smart techniques and shallow honesty, then we have broken a trust. If we turn out teachers whose only objective is to get a job rather than to serve the needs of boys and girls, then again we have failed. If we turn out business graduates whose only objective is to grow rich regardless of principle, again the sacrifices of our people to maintain this school have been in vain.

Great Expectations

Yours must be a higher vision and a higher mission. Yours is the responsibility to study and learn, to qualify yourselves in an exceptional way for positions of responsibility in the professions, in the business world, and for life in general. And over and beyond this, yours is a most sacred and binding responsibility to do so while observing every element of moral behavior and while employing the principle of the Golden Rule as taught by the Son of God.

We have great expectations for you. We are entitled to those expectations. The widow of whom I spoke, and the hundreds of thousands like her who bring their tithes to the storehouse of the Lord, count on you to do something in a very exceptional and worthy way.

Let the beginning of this new school year be marked with the resolution to stand a little taller, to work a little harder, to keep your lives square with the principles of morality and integrity that are of the very essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Be humble. Be prayerful. Be studious. Have a wonderful time. Enjoy life. But know also that it is serious and that there will flow from your time and efforts marvelous results both temporal and eternal if you will live the gospel of Jesus Christ while here, and prepare to live it when you leave here.

If you do this, we who have a sacred trusteeship will know that that which is provided here will not have been in vain, but that the funds to build and maintain this institution will bear marvelous and rewarding dividends for the present as well as for generations yet to come. We pray for you. We hope that you will pray for yourselves. We ask the Lord to bless you and sustain you, to give you strength and the capacity to understand and assimilate that which you are taught so that, when you have completed your work here, you may go forward into the world as men and women of faith, of great learning, and of tremendous integrity.

God bless you so to do, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.