

# *To What Purpose Is This Waste?*

L. TOM PERRY

I'm delighted to have this opportunity. Every time I come on this great campus a thrill runs through my soul as I mingle with you great young people. Seems like it's always a homecoming too. I see so many of you out there—good Bostonians, good New Yorkers. Isn't it great to have that representation here. I'm sure it influences and sweetens the campus here to have some of that good Eastern blood.

As I approach this subject today, you may find it to be a mixture of a businessman's approach and a churchman's musings. I think that wherever we find truth it's our responsibility to uphold it and defend it. I'd like to start by just reading a scripture to you that's found in the book of Matthew:

*There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.*

*But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?*  
[Matthew 26:7–8]

Now I know in our lives there are times it's difficult to determine whether it's a benefit or a waste, but most times the distinction is clearly evident between the two. In the scripture just quoted, the Savior approved of that which was

done and blessed the woman who anointed him. However, to his disciples, seeing that costly anointment, it appeared to be a waste. Today I'd like to talk to you about waste. With our ever increasing population and the depletion of our natural resources, our great hope is to become more efficient in utilizing that which the Lord has given to us and in eliminating the waste so prevalent in our society.

You see, I'm not very proud of my generation and some of the things that they have done. During the time that our nation has been under the leadership of this generation, I would guess that it's become the most wasteful in all of the world. I just can't believe my eyes sometimes as I read the paper and try to understand our approach to solving the problems that beset our nation today. I was very proud of the generation that I belong to until recent years. They appeared to have made some great contributions to mankind. Then, all of a sudden, they seemed to fall apart. After reaching a peak and becoming the richest and

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most powerful nation on earth, we appear, as they say in business, to have “topped off.” We now find ourselves turning over to your leadership a nation a few ways better but for the most part in a poorer condition than the one which was given to us. I’d like to reminisce for just a few minutes, to see if we can determine what has caused our failures.

### **The Depression and the War**

My generation had its beginnings during the great depression. We witnessed the concern of our parents as they worried about supplying us with the basic needs of life. We witnessed the waste of inactive people standing in bread lines or leaning on shovels in WPA projects. I remember marveling, as a young man, at my mother’s ability to make things stretch. I guess I had the easiest job on the block when it came to carrying out the garbage cans. The neighbors would always carry out two or three big ones. Ours was a small size, usually only half-full. The great cities would not be having the problems they have today with their garbage if all the residents were as frugal as my mother. Almost everything she processed was either biodegradable or reuseable.

About the time the great depression showed signs of fading away, our great country was disgraced at Pearl Harbor. We were just the right age to take up arms and go to fight to preserve our freedoms.

For the next several years, we witnessed firsthand the waste of destruction. We sat on the fantails of troop ships and listened to chaplains prepare us to meet our Maker as they would tell us frankly what the odds were that we would be alive at noon the following day. We were very close to our God; we pleaded to him for strength. How those prayers were answered, to give us strength and a great inner source of faith as we would go over the side and down those long cargo nets into the landing craft which would carry us to a hostile island.

Then one night a guard came running up the rows of tents where we were sleeping, shouting that he had just heard over the radio the war was over. We literally jumped through our mosquito nets and ran to the one and only radio we had, located in the mess hall. By the time we arrived, the armed forces radio was broadcasting a New York Yankee baseball game. Can you imagine our disappointment to have to listen to a baseball game when such exciting news was about to come forth? We sat glued to the radio all night, but no news came. We even changed stations to see if Tokyo Rose would be good enough to give us the announcement, but she continued on her same theme. It was two days later when we noticed in the harbor shots of tracers being fired into the air, and the big guns trained out to sea set off a fireworks display to announce the end.

A few days later we were on our way to see the waste and destruction of our efforts. Our ship dropped anchor in Nagasaki harbor and we rushed topside to look at the results of an atomic bomb. Sickened by the sight, our souls were cleansed from the hate which had been built up in our hearts against our enemies during those years of battle. As we saw the destruction of this great city, smelled the stench of the dead, and heard the cries of the orphans, our hearts mellowed and we reached out to help them rebuild that which we had destroyed.

### **Materialism**

I must say we were impressed with the initiative of the Japanese. The first day we were in the city, they had set up little stands to sell Japanese fans imprinted with the American flag. I guess they must have been manufacturing them for months, realizing that the end of the war was near, that there would be a new tourist trade coming in in the form of occupation troops.

I believe this was our finest hour. We worked hard to rebuild the world. We were the

richest and most powerful nation on earth. Our currency was the standard of the world. We couldn't work long enough or hard enough to supply the needs of those who desired our services or the goods we could export. The more we helped others, the richer we became. This was our zenith. We were so accomplished that we found ourselves not needing our God quite as much as we did when we were sitting on the fantails of those ships. In fact, we found him getting in our way on occasion. Materialism started to give us more satisfaction than religion. Soon we found ourselves without that same patriotic spirit that had propelled us out of the world to help save it and to build a better place for all mankind. We divided ourselves into special interest groups and were selfish and self-centered. Our chief interest became centered on having a big home, two cars in the garage, campers, trailers, boats, foreign vacations, fancy bars, rich food, etc. We were convinced that there was no end to that which we could produce to supply our never-ending appetites. Waste became a way of life.

Now let us examine some of the ways that our thinking changed and we started on a new approach as we would attack our problems.

### **Dishonesty**

I guess the first area would be that of dishonesty. We found ourselves unable to satisfy our needs fast enough. We looked at our employers and decided we were not getting enough for the efforts we were putting in. We didn't want to work as hard as we had been. We needed more time for TV, longer coffee breaks, extra time during lunch periods to go shopping, and so on. We wanted more for less. When it was not given to us, we decided to find alternative ways to take it. So we slowed down our production; we would take sick leave even though we were not ill. We'd find some excuse to take an extra day or two on vacations. If we felt that we were not being

paid enough, we would steal from our employers to make up the difference.

And the reaction of our employers was most remarkable. They sat in their secluded offices asking the question: "To what purpose is this waste?" Their conclusions were astounding. Rather than seeking to eliminate, they condoned! It required less effort to add a few dollars to the cost of the goods to cover the waste of dishonesty rather than to instill integrity in their employees. After all, we were the biggest and the best in the world. Everyone wanted our goods. A dollar or two on the cost would not affect them that much.

Our cost of production started to spiral time and time again. One day we were shocked to find that the demand for our goods in foreign markets had slowed down. We were further shocked to find that those nations we had defeated in battle and helped rebuild now had the nerve and the gall to produce products better than ours at a lower cost. Soon our imports exceeded our exports, and rapidly we were no longer the richest nation on earth. West Germany, the nation we had defeated and leveled to the ground and had helped rebuild, now had that honor. The mark and the yen in world money markets were making our currency look rather ridiculous. The Japanese had copied our ways and our big cities and our industrial plants, looked over what we were doing, eliminated the waste that they found in our operations, and were offering our products manufactured in their country at less cost than we could produce them.

I remember a personal experience in dealing with a Japanese manufacturer. One of the divisions that reported to me when I worked in New York was a large shoe warehouse. We warehoused over a million pair of shoes. We had been purchasing most of them from New England sources until the waste of their operation priced them out of the market. We resolved to try the Japanese market and decided to try with a gym shoe that one of our

U.S. manufacturers had been producing for us. We sent an order to Japan to compare the costs. We had a frugal shoe buyer who decided not to send a good pair, but he had a defective one that had a little marking on the heel of the left shoe. The Japanese firm agreed to produce the shoes at much less cost for us, and so the order was placed for 3,000 pairs of gym shoes. When the shoes, all 3,000 pairs, were delivered to us, they were exact copies of the American shoe in every detail, including the flaw on the left heel.

### **Pollution**

I think the next area we've had difficulty in is that of the waste of pollution. My generation was productive and even inspired in the field of invention. We saw the immediate needs of the population and satisfied those needs in an impressive fashion. However, our genius may have been premature on many occasions. We forgot, in our excitement, the total effects of these inventions compiled after years of use. Merely from looking at our polluted air and rivers we come to realize that possibly we implemented in haste without looking to the future. My generation gratified those immediate needs through all sorts of mechanical innovations to produce comfort. But in so doing, we forgot and possibly indelibly marked the sweet, quiet, natural comforts of this world that God has placed for us. My son, after coming back to Utah—I'm sure he couldn't have done this in the East—thought it wise to write a little poem on air and pollution. [Lee, will you excuse me while I quote here for a minute? I don't think he knows I have this.]

*Air  
Air comes from a complicated  
chemical occurrence  
And continues to bless us  
with ceaseless abundance.  
But what if one day  
The air left with rain,  
How could we convince it*

*To come back again?  
The air would complain,  
"Why,  
you creatures must hate me.  
There's smoke and smog  
As far as you can see,  
And people don't care  
Enough to stop smoking.  
Just one cigarette  
Depresses me choking."*

*And nobody stops a moment to ponder  
If enough air exists in expanses out yonder.  
Up buildings,  
down trees,  
Air comes with the breeze.  
Life is forever  
An end?  
Oh, never.  
Why look at me,  
I'm breathing with ease.*

*"There ought to be laws,"  
says a lawyer.  
"There ought to be ways,"  
says a chemist.  
"Where are the clean rivers?"  
asks Tom Sawyer.  
"Why,  
the plants are all dying,"  
claims a botanist.*

*A clean river formed the Grand Canyon.  
Tall trees were chopped by Paul Bunyan.  
You and I ignited this war  
The moment  
we decided to pour  
The wastes of the day  
On the world  
in a reckless way.  
Why,  
you can't see the sun anymore.*

*And nobody stops a moment to ponder  
If enough air exists in expanses out yonder.*

Up buildings,  
 down trees,  
 Air comes with the breeze.  
 Life is forever  
 An end?  
 Oh, never.  
 Why look at me,  
 I'm breathing with ease.

I think the whole problem  
 Stems from the fact  
 That air is abundant,  
 Too abundant to lack.  
 It's always been there  
 Since the world was created,  
 But a wholesome-type air  
 Will soon be outdated.

And nobody stops a moment to ponder  
 If enough air exists in expanses out yonder.  
 Up buildings,  
 down trees,  
 Air comes with the breeze.  
 Life is forever  
 An end?  
 Oh, never.  
 Why look at me,  
 I'm breathing with ease.

[Now, Lee, you'd think with all that literary genius that you have you'd get off that plateau you're on in your grade level. He consistently sends home report cards 3.9.]

When we consider pollution, again we must ask the question: For what purpose is this waste?

### Gifts of the Spirit

Now I think we must consider the gifts of the Spirit. I'm certain that as serious as the problems of dishonesty, pollution, and waste are, my generation will be condemned more for turning their backs on the faith of their forefathers. How often history has repeated the story that replacing the gifts of the Spirit with

the desires of materialism brings only heartache and disappointment. Do you remember in the Book of Mormon the account of the wicked King Noah—how Zeniff, his father, conferred the kingdom on Noah? Then the scripture records that he didn't walk in the ways of his father:

*For behold, he did not keep the commandments of God, but did walk after the desires of his own heart. And he had many wives and concubines. And he did cause his people to commit sin, and do that which was abominable in the sight of the Lord. Yea, and they did commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness. [Mosiah 11:2]*

Then he set about to tax the people, and he laid a tax of one-fifth on all that they possessed, their gold, their silver, copper, brass, iron, their fatlings of the flock, and a fifth of their grain. And he brought all this in for the support of himself and those who were living immoral lives with him. And those priests that would murmur against him he cast aside and consecrated new ones in their stead, and he went out and found those that had pride in their hearts to be his priests. And then the scripture records:

*Yea, and thus they were supported in their laziness, and in their idolatry, by the taxes which king Noah had put on his people; thus did the people labor exceedingly to support iniquity. [Mosiah 11:6]*

Well, Noah's reign lasted about fifteen years before his people turned against him and burned him. Time has a way of catching up on those who refuse to keep the commandments of God and who walk after the desires of their own hearts.

As serious as pollution of our highways, rivers, lakes, and streams may be, pollution of the mind and spirit is far more detrimental. When this occurs, an individual loses his

ability to devise clear ways of solving problems.

### **Prepare for the Day of Your Generation**

I have given you the analysis of the rise and fall of the generation to which I belong. We are almost at the end of our leadership reign. Now you prepare for the day of your generation. Your beginnings are not going to be much different from ours. The cycle that we started at the bottom went to the top, appears to have reached its peak, and has started down at a rapid rate. In all probability, you will start close to the bottom again.

My challenge to you today is not only to develop understanding, knowledge, and expertise in your chosen field, but also to gain an understanding of certain eternal principles that are basic to all positions of good leadership. To follow them will bring about a righteous accomplishment. To violate them will bring only heartache and despair.

Answer in your own hearts, "For what purpose is this waste?" For what purpose is the waste of dishonesty—of cheating yourselves and those with whom you work with dishonest acts? Or the waste of pollution—of environment and mind? Or denying the gifts of the Spirit? Isn't there one generation or one group of leaders who will be intelligent enough to look at the signs of the past and establish righteous principles that will endure and guide them in the future? I pray to God that you may supply that leadership. I pray that you may have the same righteous desires in your hearts that Alma in the Book of Mormon had when he cried:

*O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!*

*Yea, I would declare to every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto their*

*God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth. [Alma 29:1-2]*

The righteous desires of Alma should not be foreign to you. You have been blessed with a greater knowledge of the gospel than any generation before you has possessed. Now the question is, Do you have the courage to stand up and be counted for that which you know to be right? Do you have the courage to steer a straight course when worldly pressures surround you and offer you a seemingly easier and softer and more comfortable way of life? Can you be honest in your dealings with your fellowmen? Are you willing to go beyond that which is required of you and exercise your influence in bringing about honest practices? Have you the courage to set an example of right, of truth, and of justice? Are you strong enough to say no to a short-term gain when the long-range effects will damage future generations? Are you willing to enter into a partnership with the Lord and allow him to have controlling interest? Are you willing to follow his counsel and follow his direction?

Now, as I stand here today, I have no doubts concerning your potential. There has never been a better trained, a more enthusiastic generation and a more determined group than we now find in the young adult members of our Church. I challenge you today to use those tools with which you have been blessed and those you are now acquiring through your education, to be a builder in our Father in heaven's kingdom. How desperately the world needs a generation of righteous individuals who are willing to stand up on their feet and do that which our Father in heaven would require of them—not to be tempted, beguiled, in the ways of materialism, but to be willing to make sacrifices for that which they know to be right.

I bear solemn testimony to you that this is the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have a powerful and vigorous leader who is the mouthpiece of

God on earth today. I know him to be an inspired leader who is receiving that direction and guidance from our Father in heaven. Let us be found on his side, supporting that which he knows to be right and you in your hearts

know to be right. And let this influence, which is here present, spread throughout the world, inspiring many to live better lives, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.