

The Two Great Promises

L. DOUGLAS SMOOT

Thank you, Bruce, for those kind comments and, Lenore, for that beautiful number that so effectively sets the stage for this devotional. I would like to speak about “The Two Great Promises,” but before I do that, I’d like to reflect briefly on some of the past.

As Provost Hafen indicated, I’m in the process of completing my service as dean of the College of Engineering and Technology. I’ve been at BYU this time around for twenty-seven years, since 1967, and twenty-four of these years I’ve been engaged in administrative work along with the wonderful work that professors do at the university.

When I first was called to be an administrative person, a department chair, Ernest Wilkinson was the president of the university—that dates back some time because that’s four presidents back. Our college counted about eight hundred student majors; now it’s over 3,000. When I first arrived on campus we were located in the Fletcher Building, south of the Bookstore. There were three of us in Chemical Engineering then. We taught all of the classes that were taught in the discipline, and we had just one part-time secretary.

President Wilkinson’s secretary called me when I first arrived and asked me if I would

come over for an interview with President Wilkinson. It was his practice to interview all new faculty. In those days his office was at the Maeser Building. The Smoot Administration Building hadn’t been built. I said, “Yes,” and she set an appointment for the next day.

If you haven’t taught before, especially when facing new preparations for a first class experience, then you won’t fully appreciate this. I taught everything I knew the day I was teaching, and then I had to get ready for the next day by preparing all new material. I had three or four new preparations, and all I did night and day was prepare and present lectures. Well, when the next day came, you may have guessed, I worked right through that appointment. Nobody reminded me; I just worked right through it.

The secretary called and, of course, I was greatly embarrassed. She said, “Well, it’s okay. We’ll schedule it for tomorrow.” I accepted that appointment. Now, if you didn’t believe the first part, you’ll never believe this part. I

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worked right through that appointment the second day. After my second failure, the secretary called and said, “Brother Smoot, do you suppose that you could remember long enough to come now?”

Well, amazingly, I did. I do remember being in the upper area of the Maeser Building and talking to President Wilkinson, but I don’t remember so much about the conversation as I do about my efforts to arrive there.

That experience goes back to my first teaching days as a university faculty member. So much has changed since then. So much has changed in the physical plant and in the student body and in the faculty and in the university as a whole. We used to play football in a stadium where the Richards Building is now placed, and the seats were on the hillside. It held, if I recall, about ten thousand. A good neighbor and friend, Ab Swenson, was invited to speak at the Alumni Banquet several years ago in conjunction with his retirement. In reminiscing some, he said, “You know, when I first came to the university, Ott Romney was coaching the football team, and he also was assistant coach in basketball, and he coached the track team and assisted with baseball, and he taught history and he taught health.” Then he said, “How things have changed at the university. Now in football we have one coach for punting into the wind and another for punting with the wind.” That’s what you call a great transition. That may be an extreme, but it does paint the picture of the remarkable change at the university.

The Marriott Center wasn’t here. We played basketball—I played basketball for BYU in those days—in the Smith Fieldhouse. I had the experience of being on the team that played against Bill Russell and Casey Jones. Now the amazing thing is that BYU won that game against San Francisco. I haven’t forgotten the team—Boyd Jarman was our center; he teaches in physical education now—and I could name all of the players that played the key roles in

that game. The Smith Fieldhouse also held about ten thousand fans. The Clyde Engineering Building wasn’t there, nor the Martin, Widtsoe, Tanner, Harris, or Talmage Buildings and others. This campus was a different place. And the enrollment—I don’t remember exactly what it was in 1967 when I returned to BYU. I’ll suppose about 13,000. It was about 6,000 when I was first a student here in 1952, and I wandered this campus well before that when there were only four permanent buildings on Temple Hill. What a remarkable transition. They used to whitewash the Y each year. Now they’ve found a more permanent way to manage that, and to even power the lights.

Well, I don’t mean by reflecting and reminiscing for a minute that I’m retiring. I’m just changing my position. I have the opportunity of returning to that marvelous position as a member of the faculty in our college, and I look forward greatly to that opportunity.

I’ve also had some anxiety about this particular presentation. This is not my first talk in a religious setting or on a religious topic. It is not my first talk in this auditorium or on the campus to the campus community. And it is not my first opportunity to speak in a professional setting. I’ve had the privilege of speaking around the world in one setting or another, but somehow this talk causes me more anxiety than other talks. I tried to determine the reasons for this feeling. It’s a different experience. I’ve never, to my recollection, given a talk on a religious or spiritual topic to my colleagues and students in a university setting. I’m not professional in the area of religious instruction, and yet there is something very special about this Church where lay people can seek to understand the scriptures and the intent of the Lord and not have to be a professional in the discipline in order to find testimony.

I have two simple objectives in talking to you this morning. One is to share with you my conviction about the sacred mission of this

university, and the second is to share with you an equally strongly held conviction about the divinity of the Savior and the truthfulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

A word about BYU then and about heritage and sacrifice. The university has elected to honor Abraham O. Smoot, my great grandfather. I take absolutely no credit for his contributions to the university, but I'm driven and motivated by his remarkable contributions here. This honoring will take place on Founders Day during Homecoming this fall, and all the Smoots are looking forward to a large family reunion. We held a reunion here in 1983 with nearly five hundred people in attendance. We look forward to helping the university honor him.

Abraham Smoot died in 1895, nearly a hundred years ago. In 1892 he said to his wife:

Annie, I haven't a piece of property that is not mortgaged. [And he was quite wealthy for his time.] I have had to do it to raise money to keep the Brigham Young Academy going. That was given to me as a mission and I would sooner lose all, than fail in fulfilling this responsibility. I love that school and I can see what it means to our youth to have a spiritual as well as book learning. It must live. [C. Elliott Berlin, "Abraham Owen Smoot, Pioneer Mormon Leader" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1955), p. 161]

Well, live it did, through sacrifices of giants who have gone before us and made contributions like his. Why was it that Abraham Smoot thought of this as a mission? Well, I can tell you that story, too. It's written in history (Marilyn McMeen Miller and John Clifton Moffitt, *Provo—A Story of People in Motion* [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974], pp. 27–28). I've often wondered how true or how apocryphal it was, but it is written and documented. Brigham Young, in the 1870s, called A. O. Smoot into his office. He had been the mayor of Salt Lake and a Church leader in the Sugar

House area and was very busy in the Church and in his business. Brigham Young said, according to the documented history,

"I'm going to call you on a mission. There are three places, all on a par. One is as good as the other. They are Hell, Provo or Texas. You can take your choice." A. O. replied, "I would sooner go to Hell than to Provo." Apparently he didn't give a second thought to Texas.

And Brigham Young is said to have responded, "Brother Smoot, if you don't go to Provo, that's exactly where you will go."

Well, he went to Provo and gave away his personal fortune to save the Academy, which had struggled for years. He died in 1895, and the Academy was still struggling financially. Yet somehow, based on such sacrifice, we see about us a unique and remarkable institution.

When I walk this campus as I have done for over thirty-five of my fifty-nine years (I like to say "fifty-nine" because it changes soon into another decade), I imagine that I see the images of these giants who have gone before—great teachers, great scholars, faithful members of the Church, and benefactors who have made this place what it is now. Yet there's so much to do.

I'd like to spend the balance of my time talking about the two great promises. From 2 Nephi 2:25 comes a very commonly known scripture among members of the Church—that "men are, that they might have joy"—and I presume that applies to all of God's children. And it says in Mosiah,

Consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. [Mosiah 2:41]

There are remarkable promises for faithful members of the Church in Deuteronomy 7,

starting with verse 11. I read such scriptures and then I look at my experiences over the last couple of decades of service in the Church and I see wonderful, faithful, worthy members of the Church who face challenges in their lives.

What kinds of challenges? All kinds of challenges. For some it is financial difficulty and setback. For others it may be disharmony in their relationships among family members. For still others it is that they can't bear children. Some may have a wayward child. Others may lose a child or a partner through a premature death or accident. Such challenges that occur in people's lives seem unlimited. I think about these things, and I see them among my neighbors and friends in the Oak Hills Stake and here at the university and in our family, and I think, "How can this be? If men are, and women are, that they might have joy, where is the joy in this kind of difficulty and challenge in life?"

Let me consider some specific examples, some from the scriptures, some from among my neighbors and friends, and some that have been reported in the news. First, you will recall in Alma 14 that Alma and Amulek had gone to the land of Ammonihah to call the people to repentance and to contend with Zeezrom. They were thrown into prison, and then scripture continues with verse 8:

And they brought their wives and children together, and whosoever believed or had been taught to believe in the word of God they caused that they should be cast into the fire. . . .

And . . . they took Alma and Amulek, and carried them forth to the place of martyrdom, that they might witness the destruction of those who were consumed by fire.

And when Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained; and he said unto Alma: How can we witness this awful scene? . . .

But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine

hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory. [Alma 14:8–11]

Here is a key about one of two great promises, that "the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory." The scripture continues:

And he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day. [Alma 14:11]

Now that answers a part of the question for me, but not all of it. I can understand that these people who did this terrible crime and caused the innocent women and children to be consumed at the stake would indeed face justice in the last day. But still I don't find an answer in that scripture as to how come these, the innocent in life, must suffer so, if people are to have joy and if they have a blessed and happy state when they keep the commandments.

Let me next mention an Idaho family, Jeff and Joy Underwood, the parents of six children. You may recall, as vividly as I do, last July when it was reported on the television that their daughter Jeralee, age eleven, had gone out to collect for her paper route. Jeralee never returned, "not that day, nor the next day, nor the next, nor ever" to her family in Idaho (see James E. Faust, "Five Loaves and Two Fishes," *Ensign*, May 1994, p. 6). After two thousand joined in the search, eventually Jeralee was found, abducted and brutally murdered. How does a family cope with this kind of tragedy? These are faithful members of the Church. Is that what you call joy, a state of happiness? The parents thanked the searchers and offered forgiveness.

Let me talk about a third example. One of the great passages of scripture to me that I just love, and that I recently read again from front

to back, is the story of Job. As it says in the scripture, he was “a perfect and an upright man” (Job 1:8). Let’s think about Job for a minute. I love this interesting passage, too:

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.

And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. [Job 1:6–7]

Well, I believe that even now the adversary goes to and fro and walks up and down in the earth.

And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? [Job 1:8]

And then you’ll recall that the Lord gave Satan rights to everything but Job’s life to test his faith. And you will remember that Job lost his property and his prosperity—and he was a very wealthy man. He lost his personal health, being covered with boils, and suffered greatly, even to the point that his family abhorred his breath. And he lost his family, through death or accident, and his friends—and even God’s presence was taken from Job. His wife told him to curse God and die. Job’s friends told him that his suffering came from God as a punishment for his sins. Can you imagine the extent of his suffering? It doesn’t seem like a blessed and happy state. But Job said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

Now let’s turn to the Prophet Joseph Smith. It does seem an appropriate time to mention this great prophet because the 150th commemoration of his martyrdom in the Carthage Jail on June 27, 1844, takes place this month. President Monson wrote a beautiful article—

you may have read it already in the June 1994 issue of the *Ensign*—about the examples that the Prophet Joseph set for us in so many ways. Think about his life. He was pursued. He was persecuted. He was tarred and feathered. He was imprisoned, and he was murdered. That doesn’t seem, somehow, like a blessed and happy state for one who kept the commandments.

What did the Lord tell Joseph Smith in prison in the Liberty Jail in March of 1839, 155 years ago? He said this:

The ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name, and fools shall have thee in derision, and hell shall rage against thee. . . .

If thou art called to pass through tribulation; if thou art in perils among false brethren; if thou art in perils among robbers; if thou art in perils by land or by sea;

. . . and thou be dragged to prison, and thine enemies prowl around thee like wolves for the blood of the lamb;

And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. [D&C 122:1–7]

It reminds me of 2 Nephi 2:2, where it says, “Thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain.” Somehow from these scriptures we obtain further insight that this blessed and happy state doesn’t mean a perfect joy in this life, because of the trials that are a natural part of our existence.

We don’t have to look into the scriptures or in our history for stories of this sort. There are countless examples in our own lives and

among our friends, family, and acquaintances—possibly not of the magnitude of those that I’ve reported. Certainly not in my life, but possibly among some of you, stories and difficulties may reach those kind of challenges.

I think of the Briggs family, our loved neighbors, who a handful of years ago were journeying during the Christmas season up Spanish Fork Canyon. Their car slipped into the way of a large, oncoming truck, and four were killed. These were faithful members.

I think of my first counselor in the stake presidency, Bob Hales, when I was called to be a stake president seven-and-a-half years ago. We’d only served a year or so together when the winter season came. Bob, husband of President Janette Hales of the Young Women presidency, couldn’t sit for long periods at the desk as we did our work in the church. He blamed his old football knee. As the winter wore on and we all coughed from flu, his cough didn’t get better; then came that inevitable and sad time when he learned he had incurable cancer. He only lived for about three more weeks. Now, to me, he was a person without guile. He was a remarkable, faithful person, and yet his life was taken.

How can this be? How is it that our “Father which is in heaven,” as it says in Matthew 5:45, “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust”? Is the answer in Alma enough that this provides a judgment for those who help to commit these transgressions? Not all of these difficulties are caused by others through their sin and transgression. Some just seem to happen, and people ask the questions “Why this?” and “Why me?”

Well, I’ve struggled with this issue myself and sought to counsel members, and when you’re in a position of counseling you want to bring some kind of comfort and reassurance to these people. Let me share some additional views with you about this issue. I found some insight regarding the two great promises from

the scriptures that I’ve shared already, but there is more that brings me comfort and, I hope, to those of you and others who face trials, because they are in all of our lives.

In D&C 101:36, we read, “In this world your joy is not full.” Well, you don’t have to conduct a research project for your college class to demonstrate that. You just look around in the lives of people to see that that is the case. The Savior goes on to say, “In me your joy is full.” Somehow, this fullness of joy doesn’t come in this particular existence but through the Lord and, presumably, through exaltation.

We read further in the second chapter of 2 Nephi about the necessity of having opposition in all things in that great message from Father Lehi. To me, this chapter is one of the greatest in all of scripture. I’ve already referenced it twice for other purposes, and it includes Lehi’s marvelous message on opposition. Light with darkness, pleasure with pain, and life with death are a natural part of our existence in this life. Now in Ether, Moroni says, where he inserts a thought, “For ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6).

Let me return briefly to D&C 121, again referring to the Prophet Joseph:

My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high. [D&C 121:7–8]

Here again is reference to one of the two great promises, the fact that we have the prospect of resurrection and exaltation if we just endure to the end. Then, as it says, “God shall exalt thee on high.” That seems clear. Such testimony is borne by those who have come back after being clinically dead. Several books now document the overwhelming feeling of light and peace that people testify to about this joy of being in the presence of a perfect being.

But how about this life? What about the first great promise? Well, there's a scripture I like particularly well that, to me, brings peace and comfort. It is Alma 36:3. There Alma counsels his son Helaman, "Whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions." Now, it doesn't say there in the scriptures—and I don't know where to find it in the scriptures—that if you put your trust in the Lord, he will eliminate the trials and the challenges and the afflictions and the troubles of life. I just don't seem to find that in the scriptures. So we accept this—this opposition, the good with the bad, the light with the darkness, the pleasure with the pain, and the life with the death—as an inevitable part of this wonderful life. Alma 36:3 then finishes with "and shall be lifted up at the last day." Here, in one scripture, we see recorded the two great promises: support in trials and exaltation.

Now please don't misinterpret just how glorious life on earth can be, and what opportunities there are here for us, and how thrilling it is to see the sunshine and the clouds and to see the rain and the water and the mountains and everything that makes our life meaningful, and to have families and to share love—all are enriching experiences. But there is opposition, and with all of this come the challenges of life as well.

So I sense, brothers and sisters, that the promise of life is not that you will, even as faithful people, be exempted from the trials and the troubles and afflictions of life. Such will be a natural and inevitable part of our existence in this life. I do see that we can cope with these challenges in life according to the promise if we put our trust in the Lord. Now, to me, that means to do his bidding, to do his will, to keep his commandments. That is, to me, what it means to trust in the Lord.

Let me go back to these people of whom I spoke earlier. I saw this trust in the Lord in Bob Hales. He said this to me as I had the privilege

to give him a blessing just prior to his passing: "Doug, I am not afraid to die. I've put my hand in the hand of the Lord, and I know that he could make me well if he willed it, but it doesn't matter." And then, with a courageous sense of humor, even amidst the pain, he said (and he was a physician), "I guess I will not worry so much about my cholesterol level."

I saw this trust in the Underwood family. Sister Underwood said,

I have learned a lot about love this week, and I also know there is a lot of hate. I have looked at the love and want to feel that love, and not the hate. We can forgive. [Faust, *Five Loaves*, p. 7]

Now, do you have this much trust in the Lord? Could you say that if you had just lost a child to a violent murder, and could you make that statement in the same week?

The Prophet said in a letter to his wife Emma:

God is my friend. In him I shall find comfort. I have given my life into his hands. I am prepared to go at his call. I desire to be with Christ. I count not my life dear to me, only to do his will. [Dean C. Jessee, comp., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1984), p. 239; spelling and punctuation modernized]

And Job said,

For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. [Job 19:25–26]

It does seem possible, brothers and sisters, to find peace amidst sorrow. Look at these remarkable examples of these four people—some our neighbors and friends, some scriptural, some living in an adjacent state—who somehow found that kind of peace and comfort through trusting the Lord in times of

tremendous trial. We can, through trust in the Lord, be strengthened to cope with the challenges of life, and we can be lifted up at the last day to a state of fullness of joy. We can be partakers of these promises.

Now may I share closing thoughts about the university and the Church. I want you to know that I willingly and gladly support and accept the environment and standards at BYU. Some have suggested that the university cannot achieve a respected place in the academic world under its policies and practices. I am prepared to let the quality and the accomplishments of the university's graduates—you students who will represent this church and this university so well—together with the scholarly and professional contributions of our faculty colleagues, settle this matter. I believe that

diversity in academic approaches is a virtue. I believe that the university is unique in its teaching and in its purpose and its mission, and I wholeheartedly support this mission. I want to do everything I can to further it. I love this university, and I am committed to its mission.

Now, about the gospel of Jesus Christ: I firmly believe and testify that if we trust God by doing his will, we will be strengthened in our trials and our troubles and our afflictions, and we will find happiness and joy, even in this life—though not perfect joy, not a full joy—and we can also be lifted up at the last day in a state of never-ending joy. I leave you this witness, and I do it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.