

**ELDER EZRA TAFT BENSON**  
*Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles*

I cannot refrain, my brethren, from expressing my personal gratification on the selection of the two fine men, Brother Seymour Dilworth Young and Milton Reed Hunter to serve as members of the General Authorities of the Church. As one who has recently come into the presiding councils of the Church, I can assure them that they can look forward to some of the sweetest, most soul-satisfying experiences that come to men in this life. With all my heart I welcome them and assure them of my love and confidence.

**OBLIGATIONS RESTING UPON THE CHURCH**

I have been impressed during this conference, with the great responsibilities and obligations resting upon this Church and its people. I was impressed with the inspiring message of President Grant, which called to our attention some of these obligations which are ours as leaders. I have often felt that there are three great and important obligations, possibly over-shadowing all others, which rest upon this people and upon this great Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The first of these, at least in the order of emphasis in this dispensation, is that of missionary work—the responsibility which rests upon this people to carry the message of the restored gospel to the people of the world. We have been engaged in that work ever since the Church was organized, yea, even before. Secondly, we have the responsibility of building up the stakes and wards and branches of Zion. This entails the building of a material kingdom, as well as a spiritual kingdom. It entails the providing of facilities—houses of worship, temples, seminary buldings—that are so necessary for us to carry on the spiritual part of the program. It entails taking care of our people, temporally, physically, culturally, and socially, as well as spiritually. And in the third place, we have the great responsibility of performing certain sacred ordinances in the temples of the Lord,—a responsibility which rests upon every holder of the priesthood as well as upon the sisters of the Church.

**MISSIONARY RESPONSIBILITY**

I was pleased to note the importance which President Grant placed in his message on the first mentioned obligation—that of missionary service. In reading the revelations which the Lord has given to us in this dispensation, I have been impressed to note that probably on no other subject has he referred so frequently as in the case of our obligation as a people to carry this message of the restored gospel to the people of the world. In reading again the revelations which the Lord has given us, I noted that at least twenty-five to thirty of these revelations make specific mention of this great responsibility

which is ours. I noted, too, that in some of the revelations, given more than a year before the Church was organized, the Lord made special mention of this important mission of the Latter-day Saints. May I call your attention, this evening, to a few of those revelations? There will not be time to discuss, in any detail, any of them. I simply call them to your attention. In February of 1829, the Lord said this:

Now behold, a marvelous work is about to come forth among the children of men.

Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day. (Doc. and Cov. 4:1, 2.)

Then he goes on to point out in that and other revelations:

Behold, the field is white already to harvest; therefore, whoso desireth to reap, let him thrust in his sickle with his might, and reap while the day lasts, that he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God. (Doc. and Cov. 6:3.)

Many of those who came in contact with the Prophet Joseph, even prior to the organization of the Church, became convinced and received testimonies of the genuineness of his message. It was not an uncommon thing for them to approach the Prophet and ask him to inquire of the Lord as to their responsibilities and obligations. You recall the important part played by the Whitmer family. It was in the home of Peter Whitmer, Sr., that the Book of Mormon was translated—at least the latter part of it was completed there. John, David, and Peter Whitmer, Jr., approached the Prophet and asked if he would inquire of the Lord as to what they might do,—what was their duty as men who had recently received the testimony of the truth. The Prophet made inquiry and we have three sections of the Doctrine and Covenants devoted to the answer to these inquiries. They are very similar. May I read from section 15—the answer to the request of John Whitmer.

Hearken, my servant John, and listen to the words of Jesus Christ, your Lord and your Redeemer.

For behold, I speak unto you with sharpness and with power, for mine arm is over all the earth.

And I will tell you that which no man knoweth save me and thee alone—

For many times you have desired of me to know that which would be of most worth unto you.

Behold, blessed are you for this thing, and for speaking my words which I had given you according to my commandments.

And now, behold, I say unto you, that the thing which will be of most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father. Amen.

It was only a short time after this that the Lord in another revelation, in which he indicated the calling of the quorum of the Twelve Apostles in this dispensation, made this statement:

Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God; For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. (Doc. and Cov. 18:10 and 11.)

And further:

And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father. (Doc. and Cov. 18:15.)

The Lord spoke frequently regarding the obligations of the elders of the Church and oftentimes commended them for their faithfulness and devotion, even to the extent of indicating that whatever they spoke when moved upon by the Holy Ghost would be the will of the Lord, the word of the Lord, and would be scripture to the people. Yet, at times, in those days, as in this day, there were men who feared men more than the Lord, and occasionally he had reason to chastise some of the elders of the Church.

In section 60, we read the following verse:

But with some I am not well pleased, for they will not open their mouths, but they hide the talent which I have given unto them, because of the fear of man. Wo unto such, for mine anger is kindled against them.

And then in the 68th section—reference to which I have already made—

And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation. (Doc. and Cov. 68:4.)

And this additional great and important promise, made to those who go forward as missionaries carrying the message of the restored gospel:

And any man that shall go and preach this gospel of the kingdom, and fail not to continue faithful in all things, shall not be weary in mind, neither darkened, neither in body, limb, nor joint; and a hair of his head shall not bow to the ground unnoticed. And they shall not go hungry, neither athirst. (Doc. and Cov. 84:80.)

So the early missionaries of the Church went forward, beginning with Samuel H. Smith, only a few days after the Church was organized. The number increased until the message was carried to all parts of the then known United States—into Canada, and by 1837, missionaries were on the eastern hemisphere. Even during the dark days of Missouri and Illinois and in the pilgrimage across the plains, missionaries went forward with their work. At times it was interrupted slightly, but always there was that urge and desire on the part of the elders of the Church, who had burning within their souls the testimony

of the truth—to carry the message of the restored gospel to the people of the world. After the Saints arrived in the valley, it was not an uncommon thing to have read long lists of names of men attending the general conference of the Church, who were called to go into the mission field and carry the message of the restored gospel. In later years it became the custom to issue the calls by letter.

#### A PERSONAL FAMILY EXPERIENCE

I shall ever be grateful for an experience which came into our family during this latter period that I refer to; something over thirty years ago. It was during the time when sacrament meetings were held on Sunday afternoon, at two o'clock, at least in the rural wards. I remember very well this particular Sunday afternoon, as father and mother returned from sacrament meeting, in the one horse buggy. As they drove into the yard and their little brood of seven kiddies gathered around the buggy, we witnessed a thing which we had never seen before in our family. Both father and mother were in tears. We had often seen mother in tears and father, offering consolation, or father weeping and mother offering sympathy. But never before had we seen them both crying at the same time. We inquired as to the reason, and we were assured that everything was all right. As we followed them into the house and sat down in the living room, mother told us that father had received a letter from Box "B." That was a call to go on a mission. She explained that they were grateful that he was considered worthy to go and that they were happy; but they knew that it meant separation for a period of two years, and they had never been separated more than one night at a time in all of their married life.

This is only a little thing. Practically every family in the Church could tell similar and even more impressive experiences in connection with this great missionary movement. Father went, as your fathers and grandfathers went. The eighth member of our family was born after he got into the field. How I appreciate the faith of our mothers, and our grandmothers. Important has been their responsibility in connection with this great missionary service.

#### MISSIONARY WORK OF MEN IN THE ARMED SERVICE

Now, during this critical period, through which we are passing—this war period—our missionary program has been seriously interfered with. I visited a mission not long ago and found not one single young man of military age in the missionary service—all were in the armed service of their country. The missionary corps was about ten percent of the normal number and made up almost entirely of young women missionaries and elderly married couples. And yet, as I have thought of this war condition, through which we are passing, and the effect upon our missionary program,—I cannot help feeling that we are probably doing more total missionary work today than we have ever done in the history of the Church. While our number of full-

time missionaries has been reduced, we have, it is estimated, almost one hundred thousand of our young men in the service of their country, hundreds and thousands of whom are doing effective missionary work.

There came to my office a few days ago a young marine, a former stake missionary, with one of his buddies. He told me that he had been doing missionary work with his associates. He had recently baptized this young man, and they had come to the Church office building, during their leave, in the hope that this new convert to the Church could receive a patriarchal blessing.

Only this week there came to my office several young men, in the uniform of their country, who were thrilled with the experiences they were having in the mission field, although in the service of their country. One of them said, "Brother Benson, it is just like being on another mission. Conditions are different, but we have opportunities to preach the gospel, and we are taking advantage of it." A letter from a young man down in the South Pacific, only a few days ago, told of the struggle they had had on one of the islands to get together a small group of Latter-day Saints. He said the first time they held a meeting there were only three present. Then, gradually the number increased until the day he wrote the letter, which was Sunday, he said, "There were sixteen of us at the service today. Four of the boys have joined the Church since the war started."

And so, my brethren, I feel that we have cause to rejoice that we have boys in the service with faith sufficient, with the testimony of the truth that impels them to carry that missionary spirit to their buddies in arms.

#### THE MESSAGE OF THE RESTORATION MUST GO FORWARD

I know there are many of our friends outside the Church who wonder why we do it, why we make the sacrifice, why we go to the expense of sending out missionaries. We have sent, it is estimated, approximately seventy-five thousand missionaries into the field during the brief existence of the Church; at a cost, I am sure, if we figure the money expended and the income sacrificed, of possibly more than two hundred million dollars. Why do we do it? I received a letter following the last general conference from a young man from this city, not a member of the Church, who asked that very question:

"Why does the Mormon Church continue to send missionaries out into the world, particularly to Christian countries?" May I read the words of the First Presidency of this Church, uttered three years ago yesterday, from this very pulpit, in which they gave answer to this question.

It is our duty, divinely imposed, to continue urgently and militantly to carry forward our missionary work. We must continue to call missionaries and send them out to preach the gospel, which was never more needed than now, which is the only remedy for the tragic ills that now afflict the world, and which alone can bring peace and brotherly love back amongst the peoples of the earth.

Therefore no act of ours or of the Church must interfere with this God-given mandate. This is not a matter of our own choosing. It is not something that has been devised by man. The Lord has made it clear to us, my brethren, that the responsibility is ours, as holders of the priesthood, to carry this message of the restored gospel to the people of the world. And now, during this period of war-stimulated prosperity, when money seems to flow freely, we hope that as leaders in Zion—as fathers—we are making some plans to create a reserve so that when this great struggle is over, our missionary work can go forward with greater impetus and in greater volume than ever before in the history of the Church.

#### THE PREFACE TO THE LORD'S COMMANDMENTS

I should like to refer, in closing, to one other section in the Doctrine and Covenants. I mention this and call this revelation to your attention for the purpose of indicating that our message is a world message. It is not regional, it is not national, it is a message intended for all God's children. I refer to the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants, given years after some of these revelations that I have referred to. It was given for a particular purpose, to appear as the preface to this book of commandments which the Lord has given us in this dispensation. These are the words of the Lord, to this Church and to the world:

Hearken, O ye people of my Church, saith the voice of him who dwells on high, and whose eyes are upon all men; yea, verily I say: Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together. For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; . . . And the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days. . . . Behold, this is mine authority, and the authority of my servants, and my preface unto the book of my commandments, which I have given them to publish unto you, O inhabitants of the earth.

And then further on:

And again, verily I say unto you, O inhabitants of the earth: I the Lord am willing to make these things known unto all flesh; For I am no respecter of persons, and will that all men shall know that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion. . . . Search these commandments, for they are true and faithful, and the prophecies and promises which are in them shall all be fulfilled. What I the Lord hath spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same. (Doc. and Cov. 1:1-3, 4, 6, 34-35, 37-38.)

And so, my brethren of the priesthood, our message is a world message, the obligation is ours. The Lord expects us to carry his message to the inhabitants of the earth. Possibly never before in the history of the world, has there been a greater need for the simple, but divine message of the restored gospel. God help us to do our duty in this respect, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.