

ELDER JOSEPH F. MERRILL

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

Brethren, we are alone this evening, the microphone having been switched off from the powerful KSL broadcasting station. We, therefore, become a priesthood leadership meeting of the same type as we are now holding as a part of stake quarterly conferences. So it will be in order for me, I hope, to talk about matters that primarily concern priesthood officers.

EFFECTS OF HARSHNESS AND KINDNESS

In the bishops' meeting last evening in this hall, Bishop M. O. Ashton told two stories that deeply impressed me. Each story was about a bishop and some boys. In the first one, a group of boys engaged in some Halloween pranks of a rather serious, provotative nature. The bishop secured the names of the boys and charged them to come to the sacrament meeting and publicly ask forgiveness for engaging in the pranks committed, on pain of excommunication for failure to do so. In consequence there are in that community today a number of families that grew up outside of the Church.

In the second case a group of boys and a bishop were involved. A wedding party was held at the bishop's home. A big freezer of ice cream waited on the back porch for the refreshment hour. When the cream was to be served, it was observed that the freezer was empty. Pondering over the matter the bishop decided to invite the guilty boys to an ice cream festival and provided two freezers of ice cream for the occasion. All the boys accepted the invitation. When the lads were seated at the feast, it was noticed that tears began to run down one boy's face. Soon all the other boys were in tears also. From among that group have come some of the finest leaders in their community.

Those were the factual stories told by Bishop Ashton. Hearing them I was reminded of section 121:39-41, Doctrine and Covenants, which reads as follows:

We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called, but few are chosen. No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned.

The two bishops of the story were undoubtedly actuated by the best of motives. Not for a moment would I question that. But one bishop was wise and the other unwise. The thought in the mind of one was to use persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and love, so beautifully stated in the revelation quoted. In the case of the other bishop he seems to have acted impulsively, yielding

to the influence of the evil power. He forgot the scriptural injunction found in the Doctrine and Covenants 64:9-10:

Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin. I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men."

I do not find in the teachings of the Master the word "must" used in the sense of force. But we do find the message of the foregoing quoted scripture printed in a beautiful hymn, found in the *L.D.S. Hymn Book*, 24th edition, 1905, the first two stanzas being as follows:

Know this, that ev'ry soul is free
To choose his life and what he'll be;
For this eternal truth is given,
That God will force no man to heaven

He'll call, persuade, direct aright,
And bless with wisdom, love, and light;
In nameless ways be good and kind,
But never force the human mind.

FREE AGENCY A GOD-GIVEN PRINCIPLE

We all remember, according to the scriptures, both ancient and modern, in that great council held in heaven when a plan was being considered to offer the Father's children when they came to earth, that Lucifer, the son of the morning, was there. He wanted to be sent to earth to have charge, promising the Father that all his children would be returned to him—none to be lost—provided the Lord would give Lucifer his glory. (See Moses 4:1-4.) Satan proposed to accomplish his purpose by the use of force—by denying men their free agency, taking from them their inalienable right that the Father gave to all his children in the spirit world as well as in the world of mortality. Free agency and accountability go hand in hand—they complement each other.

But I have digressed; let me return. There is no indication in the stories Bishop Ashton told that either bishop wanted to take free agency from the boys, but they certainly wanted to reform the boys. One succeeded, and the other failed, due to the methods employed. And this suggests the need for care, study, and prayer not only in dealing with boys but in dealing with all other people as well. Perhaps no two individuals are exactly alike. What is good for one may be bad for another. What succeeds with one may utterly fail with another. I have heard physicians say that this is one reason that makes the practice of medicine interesting—the fact that the doctor continually faces a challenge; for what is one man's meat may be another man's poison.

BISHOPS' DUTIES

In large measure, a bishop deals with individuals rather than with people en masse. If it were not so, there would often be insufficient reasons for dividing a large ward, for large wards have some advantages not usually possessed by smaller ones. But the need of individual treatment requires of the bishop wisdom, discernment, tact, sympathy, love, in order that he may succeed, without giving offense, in best serving his people. Among other duties, he is required to administer programs designed to help the boys and girls of his ward. As I see it these duties, in general, are second in importance to no others. If we can save the youth of the Church, we will save the Church. I would not have anyone think, however, that the individual exists for the Church. The reverse is true—the Church exists for its members. Because this is true, the Church is perhaps the finest example of a large democratic organization found in all the world. No individual can grow up in it, taking advantage of the opportunities offered him therein, without experiencing large personal growth and development in personality, attributes, talents, powers, and other leadership qualities.

ETERNAL PROGRESSION

Yes, the Church teaches the fact that each of us is a child of God, both in the spirit and in the flesh. Since in the realm of life, like begets like, we normally must possess, even though in ultra-microscopic quantities, the attributes of God our Father. And a characteristic teaching of the Church is that "as God now is man may become"—a statement in poetic language of our magnificent doctrine of eternal progression. Man is in very deed the acme of creation. In the language of the Psalmist we too can ask:

What is man, that thou are mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. (Psalms 8:4-5.)

So in the plan of eternal progression life here on earth is an essential link, and in this link the most important thing is man—the individual. This is evident from the plan which, if successfully followed, will lead the participants back to the Father's presence. The Lord revealed to Moses that:

... This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. (Moses 1:39.)

To accomplish his purposes the Lord has set up his highly organized Church as an agency to serve his children. Hence the Church exists for us and for all who will accept its service.

SERVICE BRINGS OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

And we who are here this evening, and many thousands of others besides, have been honored by being called into the service of the Church and thus given opportunity to serve our fellow men. If we serve well, we will be blessed. I am reminded at this point of the words Shakespeare put in the mouth of one of his characters:

... it [mercy] is twice blessed; It blesses him that gives and him that takes.

And of the two, the giver is usually the greater blessed—always so if he blesses with a sincere, unselfish motive.

Now let us, too, remember that to accept a proffered opportunity to serve is to accept a responsibility as well. We then in very fact become to an extent our brother's keeper. And in a larger or a smaller measure the welfare of a brother, a child of God, is in our keeping. From this point of view how fit for divine condemnation is he who having accepted responsibility fails in his duty to his brethren. Should not this thought act as a spur to the discharge of duty? Should it not help to send us reverently to our knees to seek earnestly and sincerely for the Lord's aid, suited to our needs? Without his help, brethren, none of us can fully succeed in his work. But succeeding, how great the joy and satisfaction that fills our breasts—a delightful feeling that all the money of a millionaire could not buy for us. This type of feeling is a reward from our God for service in his cause. It is an evidence of his acceptance of our efforts.

SATAN'S POWER BEING EXERCISED

Another point and I am done. Let us not forget that Satan, a spirit brother of ours, is here on earth with a myriad of other spirit brothers. They are among us for a purpose—they are doing all in their power to destroy us and handicap the work of the Lord. Satan knows us—our desires, our weaknesses, our secrets. He tempts us in a multitude of ways. He attacks us where we are weak, not where we are strong. He stirs us up to doubt, to question, to criticize, to hate, to be slothful, discouraged, sinful, and wicked. He is at the bottom of dissension among the Saints. He is ever near at hand to make attempts to overcome and lead us away. I have in mind not only us in this meeting but people generally. Undoubtedly Satan's influence and power in the world today is greater than ever before.

We here and many others in the Church are called to be watchmen upon the towers of Zion where duty calls us to be faithful in teaching the Lord's way of life by example as well as by precept. Then we shall be effective missionaries. And upon the Church is divinely placed the heavy responsibility of carrying on missionary work, a labor to which all baptized members are called, be they liv-

ing at home or abroad. No one can escape the all-seeing eye of God our Father, who keeps us constantly wherever we are under scrutiny. Let us remember that finally the books will be opened and we will be judged by the things therein written—the deeds done in the body.

Through his wiles Satan is leading some of our people away. Describing conditions in the last days, Jesus, speaking to his disciples, said:

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. (Matt. 24:24.)

Brethren, there is but one way of safety—live honestly, sincerely, and whole-heartedly near to the Lord and be wholly loyal to the leadership of the First Presidency of the Church.

I pray that every one of us with the help of the Lord will have the desire, courage, and strength thus to live, and do it in the name of our Redeemer. Amen.

The Tabernacle Choir Men's Chorus sang the hymn, "O My Father," (by Eliza R. Snow).

President Clark:

We are deeply grateful for that beautiful hymn—the hymn just sung—a hymn that I think is more instinct with the gospel and the gospel plan than any other hymn we have.

ELDER FRANKLIN L. WEST

Church Commissioner of Education

Brethren: I trust that the same beautiful spirit that has characterized the addresses of those who have spoken before may be with me in order that I may be able to say something that will be worthy of your time and attention, because I know that this is a very important assignment, and I feel quite unworthy and quite incapable of adequately filling this position.

I am very grateful for all the blessings that have come to me as a member of this Church. I am thankful that my father and mother lived the gospel from their early youth. In our home there was the spirit of love and peace. We had blessings on the food; we had family prayers. They not only encouraged us to go to church, but they went themselves. I have had the advantage of being brought up in all of the auxiliaries of the Church and have been active in all of the organizations, practically all of my life. I am grateful for the testimony that I have. It has been a great source of comfort, strength and joy to me. I am happy to be identified