

ELDER EZRA TAFT BENSON

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

My beloved brethren and sisters: This is an inspiring but sobering experience. I pray for the inspiration of heaven and for your faith and prayers as I attempt to speak to you briefly this afternoon.

FAITH OF THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

I never return from visiting one of the great missions of the Church, as I did this week, or return from visiting a stake of Zion, but what my heart is filled with gratitude as I note the devotion, the loyalty, and the faith of the Latter-day Saints. As I witness the growth of the work of the Lord in various parts of the world, my heart rejoices. With you, my brethren and sisters, I love this great latter-day work. I am wondering today if we fully appreciate what we have.

I have sometimes said to my wife, as I returned from visiting in the stakes, that I do not know exactly what heaven is going to be like, but I could ask nothing finer over there than to have the pleasure and joy of associating with the type of men and women I meet in the leadership of the stakes and wards of Zion and the missions of the earth. Truly we are richly blessed. President Smith continually calls our attention to the rich treasures of heaven that come to us as Latter-day Saints, members of the true church of Christ. It is about one of these blessings that I should like to speak briefly this afternoon.

The Prophet Joseph said many years ago that one of the greatest sins for which the Latter-day Saints are guilty is the sin of ingratitude. I wonder, my brethren and sisters, if we are fully grateful for all that we enjoy.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURE OF TRUE CHURCH

One of the distinguishing features, and a very important feature, of the true church of Christ is its priesthood, the authority of God. It is widely distributed among the male membership of the Church, boys and men, fathers and sons, and its blessings are shared by our mothers, daughters and wives. Do we fully understand and appreciate what it means to us? What is it and what is its significance to those of us who have been blessed with it?

President Joseph F. Smith said:

[The priesthood] is nothing more nor less than the power of God delegated to man by which man can act in the earth for the salvation of the human family, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and act legitimately; not assuming that authority, nor borrowing it from generations that are dead and gone, but authority that has been given in this day in which we live by ministering angels and spirits

from above, direct from the presence of Almighty God. . . . (*Gospel Doctrine* 1939 edition, pp. 139-140.)

President Taylor said:

[Priesthood] is the power of God delegated to intelligences in the heavens and to men on the earth. (*The Gospel Kingdom*, p. 129.)

So priesthood transcends this mortal life. Its power and greatness has been referred to by prophets, modern and ancient. In my own heart I can conceive of nothing greater that man can possess than the priesthood of God, coupled with a burning testimony of the divinity of this work. The two should always be coupled together. Priesthood is the very heart of the Church. We may have the priesthood without the Church, but never the Church without the priesthood.

GIFT OF THE HOLY PRIESTHOOD

There are many gifts that we enjoy as members of the Church, but I can think of none greater than the gift of the Holy Priesthood, the authority to represent God in the earth. This priesthood is destined to build and exalt men as well as to assist the Lord in the promotion of his great work in saving and exalting the souls of men.

In recent weeks, in fact, within the last few days, there have come into this building two distinguished Americans, one of them the President of the United States. I was not able to attend the meeting at which he spoke, but as I sat here the other night and contemplated our blessings as we listened to the other distinguished visitor, I wondered how men of the priesthood regard their priesthood in comparison with the honors of men, political and otherwise. Is the wealth of the world or the honors of men to be compared with the priesthood of God?

I realize it comes easy. Our boys twelve years of age, if worthy, receive the Holy Priesthood by the laying on of hands, and our young men are hardly more than boys when at nineteen they receive the holy Melchizedek Priesthood, the authority to officiate in the most sacred ordinances known to man. This priesthood will, if they are worthy, entitle them eventually to a place in the celestial kingdom of God. I have been amazed at the great number of men and boys in the Church who hold this great authority and who have in their hands this great blessing, if they will only take advantage of it.

I checked a few figures recently, which indicate that we have approximately 280,140 men and boys in the Church who hold the priesthood. There are 146,330 who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood—elders in the Church—who are candidates for the celestial kingdom. We have 133,810 boys who have been blessed with this great privilege of serving in the name of the Master.

OBLIGATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD BEARER

What is the obligation of the priesthood bearer? We have been referred to as the greatest body of men on the face of the earth. Of course the fact that we possess the priesthood, is no assurance of our exaltation. But certainly in terms of power, prerogative, and responsibility no group of men in all the world has been blessed with such obligations and opportunities as has the body of men and boys in the Church who hold the priesthood.

I have been impressed, too, my brethren and sisters, that probably nowhere in all the world can we find a group of men who give so unselfishly of their time, their means, and their talents to the promotion of good and righteousness in the world as does this body of men. I marvel as I witness the great voluntary service which is carried forward by this body of priesthood, and always in the back of my head, as I give encouragement to greater activity, is the assurance that this is a choice group of men. In the Church, there is truly a spirit of unselfish service.

SPIRIT OF SERVICE

There came to my office a few days ago a fine upstanding, sweet-spirited elderly man. He came in timidly and took a chair at the desk, and then he said: "Brother Benson, how old can a man be before he is too old to go on a mission?"

And I answered: "My good brother, I do not know that there is any upper age limit."

He said: "I have been on two missions, and I would like to go on one more before I pass away. I would like to go back to Oklahoma, where I served my second mission. Do you think I am too old?"

"How old are you?"

"Eighty-six; but I would like to go once more before I die."

Now, there is much of that spirit among the priesthood of the Church. I thrill with it, my brethren, and I am grateful to be associated with men who carry that spirit.

I have been impressed in reading the revelations, that there are at least four significant things pertaining to this priesthood which have been emphasized by the Lord to his prophets. If I may, I would like to refer to those four items.

OATH AND COVENANT OF PRIESTHOOD

Back in 1832 when the missionaries had returned from their fields of labor to Kirtland, Ohio, and had evidenced concern about the priesthood which they had been blessed with, the Lord gave a revelation on priesthood, contained in the 84th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. In that revelation the Lord spoke of the "oath and covenant" of the priesthood, and the obligation of men who

hold it to be true and faithful to that priesthood and to magnify their callings. The Lord said:

... whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying of their callings, are sanctified by the Spirit, . . . [and become] . . . the church and kingdom and the elect of God. (D. & C. 84:33-34.)

And then, even more significant, this great promise was made: ". . . therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him," (*Idem* 38) the priesthood-bearer who is faithful and magnifies his calling.

"... this," says the Lord, "is according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood . . . those who receive the priesthood," the Lord indicates, "receive this oath and covenant of my Father, which he cannot break. . . ." (*Idem* 39-40.)

And this solemn warning:

But whoso breaketh this covenant after he hath received it, and altogether turneth therefrom, shall not have forgiveness of sins in this world nor in the world to come. (*Idem* 41.)

Now this covenant is between our Heavenly Father and those of us who bear the priesthood. We promise when we receive it to be true and faithful, to honor the priesthood and magnify it. The Lord promises in return the richest blessings of eternity.

"ANXIOUSLY ENGAGED IN A GOOD CAUSE"

The *second* significant thing spoken of in the revelations is found in the fifty-eighth section of the Doctrine and Covenants and was given to the elders 117 years ago. It is to the effect that men who hold the priesthood "*should be anxiously engaged in a good cause.*" The Lord points out that it is not to be expected, it is not expedient, "it is not meet," he says, "that I should command in all things," for he that does not anything until he is commanded is a slothful servant. And then he says: ". . . men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause . . . and bring to pass much righteousness" (D. & C. 58:26-27), of their own free will for the power is in them to be agents unto themselves.

So it is not enough to receive the priesthood and then sit back passively and wait until someone prods us into activity. When we receive the priesthood, we have the obligation of becoming actively and anxiously engaged in promoting the cause of righteousness in the earth, because the Lord says:

... he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned. (*Idem* 29.)

PRIESTHOOD EXERCISED UPON RIGHTEOUSNESS

The *third* significant thing regarding the priesthood and the priesthood-bearer is that it should be exercised "*only upon princi-*

ples of righteousness." Reference was made by President Clark this morning to that section of prayer and prophecies of the Prophet Joseph, section 121, in which it is pointed out that many are called but few are chosen. And the reason why they are not chosen is because men's hearts are so set upon the things of this world and aspire to the honors of men that they do not learn fundamental lessons. "That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven" (D. & C. 121:36), and the priesthood can be exercised and controlled only upon the principles of righteousness. Yes, there is danger in receiving authority and power, if exercised unrighteously. And the Prophet makes it very clear that it seems to be the disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little power, to exercise unrighteous dominion over their fellows, and when that time comes, then there usually follows the spirit of apostasy, a spirit of criticism, a tendency to persecute the Saints and fight against the Church. "No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood," says this section, "only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned." (*Idem* 41.) And then great promises follow to the man who exercises his priesthood upon the principles of righteousness.

ACT IN ALL DILIGENCE

The *fourth* significant thing is found in that great revelation on the priesthood, given through the Prophet to the Council of the Twelve and the Church as the Twelve were about to depart on missions to various parts of the country. It is contained in the 107th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. The Lord closes that great revelation with these words:

Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence. He that is slothful shall not be counted worthy to stand, and he that learns not his duty and shows himself not approved shall not be counted worthy to stand. (Ibid. 107:99-100. Italics speaker's.)

There are two obligations in connection with that significant injunction; first, that we learn our duty, and secondly, that we act in the office in which we have been appointed in all diligence.

Now to help to make this priesthood more effective in our lives and in the lives of those we serve, the Lord has provided quorums of the priesthood—service units, classes, brotherhoods—through which we may operate and make our efforts more productive of good.

OBLIGATIONS OF PRIESTHOOD

There are really two great obligations resting upon the priesthood quorum, or brotherhood. First, is the obligation of looking after the welfare of our members. Anything pertaining to the so-

cial, economic, or spiritual welfare of members should be the concern of the quorum. In addition, it is the great obligation of quorums to assist in promoting the program of the Church which is three-fold: first, the building up of the stakes and wards of Zion and keeping the people in the line of their duty; second, the carrying of the message of the restored gospel to those who have not yet heard it or accepted it; and third, the carrying forward of the great responsibility of temple work for the living and the dead in the houses of the Lord.

These obligations rest squarely upon the priesthood.

INACTIVE MEMBERS PRESENT CHALLENGE

Now, my brethren, we face a great challenge. At the present time we have wide participation and wide activity, and we are making progress as evidenced by the records that come in from all parts of the Church. Our progress is splendid. Our performance probably was never any better, if as good, as now, yet there is much to be done. As we have checked the records for last year, we find that approximately one-third of the total Melchizedek Priesthood membership is not engaged in any Church activity of any kind. In addition to this group we have approximately twenty thousand men over twenty-one who hold no priesthood; approximately fifty-six thousand adult members of the Aaronic Priesthood, and some four thousand boys twelve to twenty-one not yet ordained. This gives a total of eighty thousand for which the Lord will hold us in large measure responsible, to win them to activity and devotion, so that they may receive the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood and enjoy blessings which flow therefrom. This great number, plus inactive Melchizedek Priesthood members, present a great responsibility and challenge. In their veins flow some of the best blood of this dispensation.

We are expected, in very deed, to be our brother's keeper, and if we fail, we will, of course, be our own accusers. Now is the time to live the standards of the Church, to magnify our priesthood, to live worthy of the rich promises made to us as bearers of the priesthood. Let us, therefore, be anxiously engaged in a good cause. Let us be true to the oath and covenant of the priesthood. Let us exercise the priesthood upon the principles of righteousness. And let us all learn our duty and act in the office in which we have been appointed in all diligence.

I leave with you, my brethren and sisters, my testimony that no greater blessing can come to any man on this earth than to receive the priesthood of God and a testimony of the divinity of this work, if he honors that priesthood and lives according to the teachings and standards of the church.

This is the work of God. I know it as I know I live. May God help us as a body of men, clothed with power and authority, to help

establish Zion and build up the kingdom, to go forward and accomplish the work which the Lord would have us do, without flinching and without hesitation, in all faithfulness, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

ELDER ROY W. DOXEY

Formerly President of Eastern States Mission

I am grateful indeed for this opportunity to stand before you, coming so soon after my release from the Eastern States Mission. Sister Doxey and I have been here only one week.

Words cannot express the gratitude of our hearts for this wonderful privilege we have enjoyed of serving in a mission of the Church. There have been many things in our lives through which blessings have been received but of all things we feel this has been the greatest blessing that has come into our lives.

The missionary field is a great experience. In the mission field there is power, and there is happiness and joy in the lives of the missionaries and the membership of the Church. I should like to bring to you now the greetings of the over one hundred and sixty missionaries in that mission and also the membership of the Eastern States Mission. They are doing a very, very fine work and the Lord is blessing their efforts.

Of the many experiences which come into a missionary's life, he finds his relationship to his Father in heaven, and it has been our joy to see in the lives of the missionaries the strength which comes through diligence, through prayer and through activity in this great work.

The Lord blesses the missionaries in many, many ways. I am sure that their lives are greatly enriched, and when they come home they have found great happiness here in seeing the membership of the Church in Zion faithful and true.

I am thinking now of the many experiences which have come to many of these missionaries as they have participated actively in the work of the Lord. I recall the power and influence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of converts to this Church as they have been brought into the faith through the efforts of these young men and women. The happiness and joy that may come to them is so great that tears have been shed on many occasions by converts in expressing their happiness in the fact that they have been found by the missionaries, and their souls have been touched by the Holy Spirit.

Many expressions of joy and happiness are found in the mission field by the membership, the converts to the Church. I recall that not many months ago there came into my office a man who has served as an evangelist. He was free-lancing through this country and had spent considerable time in proselyting a message