

## ELDER EZRA TAFT BENSON

*Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles*

**M**Y BELOVED brethren and sisters: I pray for strength that I may be able to control my emotions and give vent to my feelings. I thank the Lord for the inspiration of this conference. I could wish that it might go on not for two more days but for five or ten. I have thrilled with the proceedings of the day and with the sweet, quiet, peaceful influence that is here. The past three months have, to a degree at least, been a study in contrasts.

I am sure, my brethren and sisters, you will never know how very deeply I appreciate my associations in the Church. I appreciate the hundreds and thousands of messages that have come from all parts of this nation and foreign countries expressing confidence and love and giving assurance of your faith and prayers in the new assignment which came to one of the humblest of your number.

You will never know how deeply I have missed the experiences in the Church that have been mine from week to week during the past eight years. Of course I have missed my family and the peace and quiet and love of my home, and I want you to know how much I appreciate the messages that have come following a near-tragic accident to two of my loved ones. Messages have been received from all over the Church and from outside as well.

I want you to know how much I have missed the weekly visits to stake conferences, the opportunity of visiting in the missions. I want you to know how deeply I have missed the associations with my brethren of the General Authorities. I have missed the opportunity of performing sacred ordinances, of blessing people at stake conferences and at the Church Offices. I have missed very deeply the privilege of performing ordinations and setting apart my brethren to positions of trust in the Church and kingdom of God. I have

missed the visits of humble members of the Church to my office in the Church Office Building.

I have missed the opportunity to go to the temple frequently to perform sacred ordinances, to officiate at marriages for young couples, and to have the opportunity of visiting with them intimately before and after marriage. I have missed very much my contact with the youth of the Church and with the great Mutual Improvement Associations with which I have had the pleasure, under the direction of the First Presidency, of serving.

And I have missed, even more, those Thursday meetings in the temple with my brethren, the sacred hour of prayer around the altar in the temple of God, and I have missed the meetings with the members of the Twelve as we have assembled quarterly. I have also missed the fast days on the first Thursday of the month.

I have been deeply grateful for the good people of the Washington Stake, under the faithful leadership of Brother J. Willard Marriott, for their kindness, their love, and their understanding.

I think my testimony of the truth has never been so strong as it is today. I love this work. I know that God stands at the head of it, that he lives, that he is directing this work on the earth. I know that his priesthood and power and authority are here among men, and I know, my brethren and sisters, better than I have ever known before that, even during hours of trial and anxiety, it is possible to draw close to the Lord, to feel of his influence and of his sustaining power—that one is never alone, if he will only humble himself before the Almighty. I am grateful for that testimony, for that assurance.

I know, my brethren and sisters, that the sweetest work in all the world is the work in which we are engaged in helping to save and exalt the souls

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of the children of men. There isn't anything so important, so precious, so enjoyable, so soul-satisfying.

I have been happy in the privilege to serve, in a small way at least, this great country and the government under which we live. I am grateful to the First Presidency and my brethren that they have been willing, not only to give consent, but also to give me their blessing as I responded to the call of the chief executive. I am grateful for their prayers and their faith, and I know that my leaving has, in a small way at least, added to the heavy load they were already carrying.

To me it is a great honor and a privilege to serve the government of the United States of America. Our problems are numerous, complex, and difficult. The responsibility is heavy, but I have felt the power of the faith and prayers of the Saints and Christian people generally throughout this nation, who believe in many of those eternal principles that are embodied in the gospel, the principles for which we stand as a people.

I am grateful that I have been able to get men closely associated with me who love America, who believe that the Constitution of this land embodies eternal principles. They are men of faith, men who are willing to join with me weekly in prayer in our staff meetings, men who love our free institutions, men who want to keep America strong, men who are willing to sacrifice financially in order to serve the government of the United States, this blessed land in which we live.

These men believe firmly that the supreme test of any policy, whether it be agricultural or otherwise, is this: How will it affect the morale, the character, and the well-being of our people? They are men who know that we need, and the world needs, a strong America for the critical years ahead; men, whose philosophy of life squares with the philosophy which has come to me through the teachings of the Church and kingdom of God, a philosophy which is based upon eternal principles

which to me are priceless, a philosophy which teaches that freedom is a God-given, eternal principle vouchsafed to us under the Constitution.

This freedom must be continually guarded as something more priceless than life itself. Any program that would tend to weaken this freedom is inherently dangerous and should be guarded against. I will not say more today about this philosophy—this philosophy of individual freedom and citizenship responsibility, based upon the principle of helping the individual to help himself, and discouraging people from expecting the government to support them, but encouraging them to support their own government. I am grateful for this philosophy, and I am grateful to learn that this philosophy is accepted generally and rather widely in the hearts of our people throughout this land. I hope and pray that it may be accepted even to a greater extent in the days ahead. I trust that our great purpose shall be to strengthen the individual integrity, freedom, and moral fiber of each citizen.

Brethren and sisters, I love this great nation in which we live. To me it is not just another nation. It is my firm belief that the God of heaven raised up the founding fathers and inspired them to establish the Constitution of this land, and I believe that is Mormon doctrine. This is a part of my religious faith as it is of yours. This is a great and glorious nation, with a God-given, divine mission to perform for liberty-loving people everywhere. This mission cannot be performed unless America is kept strong and virile, unless this people adheres to those eternal principles embodied in the gospel and in the Constitution of our land.

So today I pray to God that no act of mine or program that I shall ever advocate will in the slightest tend to weaken this nation in the accomplishment of that God-given mandate.

Now, my brethren and sisters, we have recently, since our last general conference, passed through a great po-

litical campaign in which we have exercised our freedom, our God-given right at the polls. I rejoice in this privilege, that we have been able to go to the polls and express ourselves freely, with heads erect, unafraid. We have differed, as is our privilege, and I pray to God we may never lose this privilege. Many of us have supported men who were not elected. The American people spoke on election day. We chose one of our number as the chief executive, and he has a tremendous responsibility.

I was impressed with that responsibility a few days ago when I was invited to attend a prayer breakfast at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D. C. Gathered there at an early hour were men of various political faiths, various religious affiliations. Brief messages were given; prayers were offered. We heard an inspirational message from the President of the United States. I sat at a table with the Vice President, a prominent congressman from up in the northwest, several southern Democratic friends, and as we visited together and enjoyed the inspiration of that occasion, I couldn't help thanking God that in America it is still possible for men of differing political faiths to come together and in unity appeal to the Almighty for his blessings upon this land of America and him who has been called to serve as the chief executive.

One piece of literature distributed at that meeting came from Conrad L. Hilton, the head of the Hilton chain of hotels. It was a picture of Uncle Sam upon his knees in prayer. I learned from Mr. Hilton later that this had come as a result of an address he had given in Chicago over one of the national broadcasting chains in which he had tried to point out that if we are going to have victory in our battle for peace, then it must be obtained through greater spirituality and dependence upon the Almighty. The response to his message, through letters and telegrams, seemed to carry one theme from people of various walks of life from all

over America. The theme was that final victory rests not on munitions, upon money or soldiers but that the final victory rests with the God of heaven.

Mr. Hilton was so impressed that he tried to picture this sentiment by showing Uncle Sam—America—on his knees in prayer. "... not beaten there by hammer and sickle," as he said, "but freely, intelligently, responsibly, confidently, powerfully." And then were added these words, "America now knows it can destroy communism and win the battle for peace. We need fear nothing or no one... except God."

Then there was penned a simple prayer beside this picture of Uncle Sam. I have taken the liberty of changing the pronoun in that prayer that it might conform with our language of prayer as we use it in the Church. I would like to read it to you:

Our Father in heaven:

We pray that thou wilt save us from ourselves.

The world that thou hast made for us, to live in peace, we have made into an armed camp.

We live in fear of war to come.

We are afraid of "the terror that flies by night, and the arrow that flies by day, the pestilence that walks in darkness and the destruction that wastes at noonday."

We have turned from thee to go our selfish way.

We have broken thy commandments and denied thy truth. We have left thine altars to serve the false gods of money and pleasure and power.

Forgive us and help us.

Now, darkness gathers around us, and we are confused in all our counsels. Losing faith in thee, we lose faith in ourselves.

Inspire us with wisdom, all of us of every color, race, and creed, to use our wealth, our strength to help our brother, instead of destroying him.

Help us to do thy will as it is done in heaven and to be worthy of thy promise of peace on earth.

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Fill us with new faith, new strength, and new courage, that we may win the battle for peace.

Be swift to save us, dear God,  
before the darkness falls.

Now, my brethren and sisters, a written prayer is not enough. A spoken prayer is not enough. If we are going to realize the hope that is in the hearts of all of us, then as American citizens, as Latter-day Saints, we must live worthy of the blessings for which we pray.

In closing, I would like to appeal to the Latter-day Saints, and all within the range of my voice today, that we seek to promote a spirit of humility throughout this great land, that we pray for the President of the United States. He is our President. He needs our faith and prayers. He has my confidence, as do the men associated with him in the cabinet.

As we bow our heads in prayer in cabinet meeting each Friday morning, I thank God that we still have in America men of faith who are not too proud to bow before the Almighty and seek his inspiration. We may not agree with all of the President's policies, and I hope if we do not, we will express ourselves vigorously and freely, either policies advocated or policies adopted. I hope the issues will be debated freely from one end of the land to the other, because therein is safety. There is always safety in an informed public.

But let us pray that the chief executive will make no serious mistakes. Let us pray for the Congress of the United States. They are made up mostly of good men, fine public servants, who want to do what is right. They also want to please their constituents, and I hope you will be wise in what you ask of them. Don't ask them for anything that is unsound. Don't put your own selfish, narrow desires ahead of the public welfare. Give our legislators your faith and your prayers.

Pray also for the great judicial branch of the government—these men who have been called and given the great

responsibility of interpreting the laws of the land. May they have the power and influence of the Spirit of heaven that as they interpret those laws they may do so in keeping with the spirit of the Constitution in a manner pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

God bless us, my brethren and sisters, as Latter-day Saints, that we may wield our influence to the very maximum in promoting peace, in promoting spirituality among the people of this great nation, that this great country of which we are a part, may be preserved, and may continue to be, through all the days to come, a beacon and an inspiration to liberty-loving people everywhere. God grant his blessings to this people and upon this great land, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### President David O. McKay:

Elder Ezra Taft Benson of the Council of the Twelve has just spoken to us. We are glad that he has been able to leave the strenuous duties incumbent upon him as Secretary of Agriculture to attend at least some of the sessions of this conference.

Elder Samuel E. Bringhurst will be one of the speakers tonight.

The combined Scandinavian choirs will now sing "The Heavens Are Telling," conducted by Elder R. Hulbert Keddington.

The closing prayer will be offered by Elder Charles Oscar Dunn, president of the Boise Stake, after which this conference will stand adjourned until seven o'clock this evening, when, in accordance with the custom of the Church, the General Meeting of the Priesthood of the Church will be held. Only those holding the priesthood are invited to be present. Persons not holding the priesthood will kindly refrain from attempting to enter the building or any of the other buildings that will be occupied.

That session will not be broadcast, but overflow meetings will be held in the Assembly Hall and Barratt Hall.