

ELDER EZRA TAFT BENSON

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

MY BRETHREN AND SISTERS AND FRIENDS, both seen and unseen: Humbly and prayerfully I stand before you this Sabbath day. I have prayed fervently that I might have the power to say what is in my heart, and what our Father in heaven would have me say.

It is good to come home. For one who is on temporary leave from his official duties in the Church, and who misses very greatly the daily and weekly intimate contacts with the Church and its program—the visits to the stakes and missions—it is doubly good to be home; and to one who went through the experience which I went through six months ago, it is triply good to be home.

I was here to attend conference in April. In the early morning hours of the day when the conference was to open—because of the press of official duty—it became necessary for me to leave and return East. I would like to say, President McKay, if you should ever want to test the faith of the Latter-day Saints who live on the eastern seaboard just send them home as the conference is ready to open. I hope I never have to repeat that performance.

I have felt in my heart, my brethren and sisters, that I would like to say just a word regarding a simple principle and practice of the Church. I'd also like to express my testimony regarding the power of that simple principle and practice, and also express my gratitude for the influence which that principle and practice has had in my life and the lives of those whom I love and associate with.

I speak of prayer.

I express my gratitude to my brethren of the General Authorities for their constant prayers in my behalf, as they gather in the temple to the east of us weekly, around the sacred altar in that glorious temple. I express my gratitude and thanksgiving for the prayers offered in my behalf in the stake conferences and the other meetings throughout the Church. I express gratitude for the prayers and the faith of my devoted wife and children, who have complete faith in this glorious principle.

I express also my thanks for men and women, individuals in and out of the Church throughout this great land, and in foreign lands, who have expressed their faith with their prayers in my behalf. Hundreds and thousands of letters have come in from people in all walks of life, expressing their feelings and indicating that their prayers are being offered.

Only recently I was speaking at a great meeting in Chicago—a dinner meeting—to an audience not wholly friendly. Just before I was to speak a colored waiter whispered over my shoulder and said, "Mr. Secretary, would it be helpful to you before you speak to know that thousands of people throughout America are praying for you tonight."

I know not by what methods rare
But this I know: God answers prayer.
I know that he has given his word
Which tells me prayer is always heard
And will be answered soon or late
And so I pray, and calmly wait.
I know not if the blessings sought
Will come just in the way I thought,
But leave my prayers with him alone
Whose will is wiser than my own;
Assured that he will grant my quest
Or send some answer far more blessed.

Eliza M. Hickok

It is my testimony, my brothers and sisters and friends, that God does hear and answer prayers. I have never doubted that fact. From childhood, at my mother's knee where I first learned to pray; as a young man in my teens; as a missionary in foreign lands; as a father; as a Church leader; as a government official, I know without any question that it is possible for men and women to reach out in humility and prayer and tap that Unseen Power; to have prayers answered. Man does not stand alone, or at least, he need not stand alone. Prayer will open doors; prayer will remove barriers; prayer will ease pressures; prayer will give inner peace and comfort during times of strain and stress and difficulty. Thank God for prayer.

I am very grateful today that prayer has played such an important part in

the establishment of this great nation. To every Latter-day Saint this nation has a prophetic history. Ancient American prophets predicted the coming forth of this nation and the establishment of the Constitution of this land. You can read in that sacred volume, the Book of Mormon, prophecies made centuries before this nation was established regarding the coming of Columbus and the Pilgrim fathers. Ancient prophets said these would humble themselves before the Lord. I have always been very grateful in reading the official records to find that they did humble themselves before the Lord; that their first official act in coming to these shores was to go on to their knees in humble gratitude and thanksgiving to the Lord.

The Founding Fathers, in order that their new experiment make sense, had to turn to religion, had to turn to the scriptures, had to turn to the prophecies, the Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount. Then when the time came for the establishment of the Constitution, and when the time came for them to issue their Declaration of Independence, a sacred document issued in white heat on the anvil of defiance, they appealed to the Almighty, both at the opening of that document and at its closing. They spoke of eternal truths. They spoke of the fact that men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, about which President Clark spoke so beautifully last evening.

Then, at the close of the document they said,

... with a firm reliance on Divine Providence we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

And even in the formulation of the Constitution, which was done slowly and painfully, wrought on the forge of national necessity, prayer played an important part. There at the Constitutional Convention, when it seemed as if their efforts were to fall flat and to be of no avail, one of those whom the God of heaven had raised up unto this very purpose, to help establish the Constitution of this land—and you can read of it in Section 101 of the Doctrine and Covenants, in a revelation given to the Prophet Joseph—one of these Founding

Fathers, Benjamin Franklin, his head gray with age, about the oldest in the group, and possibly the most experienced statesman of the lot, is reported to have stood up in the convention and uttered these words:

In the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for divine protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard and they were graciously answered. . . . I have lived a long time and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs the affairs of men.

And the old statesman continued,

If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it possible that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, sir, in the sacred writings that except the Lord builds a house they labor in vain who build it. I firmly believe this, and I also believe that without this conferring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel.

It is my belief today, my brethren and sisters, that we need as a nation that same faith, that same reliance on divine aid and assistance, as was needed at that Constitutional Convention. I am very grateful that they established and wrote into their documents—their basic documents—a recognition of their dependence upon the Almighty; that they stamped on their coins the slogan, "In God We Trust."

Does it not inspire you, as it does me, when you go back through the history of this land and try to envision in your mind Washington at Valley Forge, during that terrible winter, on bended knees in the snow imploring divine guidance? Does it not thrill you as you see Abraham Lincoln during the crucial days of the Civil War driven to his knees in prayer to the Almighty, and to hear him say,

God rules this world. It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the over-ruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow . . . and to recognize the sublime truth that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

It is my plea today, my brethren and

sisters—men of the priesthood particularly—that we use our influence as American citizens, and as citizens of the kingdom of God, as men who have faith in prayer, faith in God, that we will encourage our leaders, national, state, local, and civic leaders to take an interest in this matter of encouraging our people in this blessed land to bow themselves before the Almighty in prayer. I think there would be great safety in a nation on its knees. What assurance it would give of the blessings of the Almighty if the American people could all be found daily—night and morning—on their knees expressing gratitude for blessings already received, and acknowledging their dependence upon the Almighty and seeking for his divine direction.

I hope we may encourage that practice in our service clubs, schools, in our meetings of farmers, businessmen, and professional men. I have been pleased to see what I think is a turn toward an increase of interest in prayer and in religion. I was very pleased to find an increasing number of prayer groups in the Congress of the United States, where members of that body, of opposite political faith, could come together weekly and unite in humble prayer and petition to the Almighty.

I am pleased to find the increasing evidence of the practice of prayer in the executive branch of the government. I testify to the blessings which prayer has brought to the cabinet meetings of the President and to my own staff meetings. I think there is a need for it, my brethren and sisters, throughout our government. Without his divine help we cannot succeed. With his help we cannot fail.

May I mention a simple little experience that came to my personal attention some time ago. I think it was two or three years ago now when the President of the United States issued a proclamation for a day of prayer. It was not the first time it has been done in this great country, and I hope it will not be the last time. I am glad it has been done again this year. Then as is the custom, as the head of one of the departments of government, it was my responsibility, I felt, to send a memorandum to the heads of the twenty

agencies in the Department of Agriculture, and to the employees, referring to the presidential proclamation in which we were asked to devote a day to giving of thanks for blessings received, and to beseech God to strengthen us in our efforts toward a peaceful world. And so, this memorandum was sent out, from which I read just one or two sentences:

In keeping with the President's proclamation, all members of the Department of Agriculture are requested to plan their work schedules and reserve the time between 11:30 a.m. and 11:45 a.m. free from appointments and interference so that all in their respective offices may utilize this time for meditation and prayer. Facilities are inadequate for the Department as a whole to meet together. We feel, therefore, that in addition to this brief period of time set aside during the day, all should be encouraged to petition God in their homes and with their loved ones both morning and evening for guidance, clemency, and forgiveness.

I was not only pleased, but I was also delighted with the response that came from the employees of that great department. I have before me a typical little note that went to the head of one of these agencies from one of the men appointed in charge of one of the groups. I would like to read it to you as an evidence of the fact that people do respond to leadership which calls for men and women to recognize their dependence upon the Almighty, and to humble themselves before him. This is the note:

In response to Secretary Benson's memorandum of September 20 about President Eisenhower's proclamation for a day of prayer, approximately 100 of our Forest Service family met in the conference room from 11:30 to 11:45 a.m. on Wednesday, September 22. Every division in the Washington office was represented from the messenger rooms up.

I read the Secretary's memorandum which in itself is a spiritual message of encouragement and inspiration. W. K. Williams read a prayer by J. Edgar Hoover, a copy of which is attached. The meeting was closed with oral prayers by both Mr. Williams and myself.

Following the meeting and continuing through today there have been numerous telephone calls and personal expressions of

satisfaction over this opportunity for the Forest Service family to join with the President, Mr. Benson and other national leaders in this period of prayer for a more peaceful world.

Brethren and sisters, I am convinced in my heart that the spectacle of a nation praying is more awe-inspiring, more powerful, than the explosion of an atomic bomb. The force of prayer is greater than any possible combination of man-controlled powers because, as J. Edgar Hoover has so well said, prayer is man's greatest means of tapping the resources of God.

I am pleased that this nation, on several occasions, has appealed to the United Nations to open the General Assemblies with an appeal to the Almighty. I am pleased that only recently our representative in that body, referred to by President McKay some months ago, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., wrote a letter to the seventy-five members of the United Nations appealing to them to open those meetings with an appeal to the Almighty; that some representative of the churches represented there be invited in their own words to lead in prayer. Senator Lodge made the appeal to all and invited them to join him in this petition. Senator Lodge said:

I do so in the conviction that we cannot make the United Nations into a successful instrument of God's peace without God's help—and that with His help we cannot fail. To this end I propose that we ask for that help.

There is probably no single thing that the United Nations can do which will so move and touch millions of people around the world and will give them such confidence in the United Nations.

I was pleased, my brethren and sisters, as I read the report of the April conference and the remarks by Elder Mark E. Petersen, speaking as directed by the First Presidency, in announcing the series of new Church posters and cards for the benefit particularly of our young people, to note that one of them was going to be devoted to prayer. I wish there were time this morning to read the account of this particular card

and poster on prayer. One will show the picture of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and President Eisenhower in the background, and then in the foreground a family group. At the top we will read: "Great Men Pray," and again at the bottom: "Be Honest with Yourself."

Then that lovely sidepiece of explanation, which is an inspiration, and which I wish every American could read, yes, every person in the world, regarding the benefits and the blessings of prayer.

Brethren and sisters, I would like to see this nation on its knees in humble prayer. A few months ago I received a lovely poster from Conrad W. Hilton of hotel fame. This poster showed Uncle Sam in his red, white, and blue uniform on his knees, praying to the Almighty. Then the caption: "America on its knees . . . not beaten there by the hammer and sickle, but *freely, intelligently, responsibly, confidently, powerfully*. America now knows it can destroy Communism and win the battle for peace. We need fear nothing or no one . . . except God."

Yes, it is in our own enlightened self-interest to engage in this simple practice, this powerful practice of prayer. Roger Babson said many years ago: "What this country needs more than anything else is old-fashioned family prayer."

Thank God for prayer!

In closing may I quote from one or two of the scriptures because the scriptures are replete with admonitions and direction to God's children to pray. Of course, Christ set the all-important example.

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (II Chron. 7:14.)

So said our Heavenly Father to ancient Israel, and I am sure that call is repeated to us today. I ask you, when you go home, to turn to that sacred volume of scripture—that American volume of scripture, if you will—the Book of Mormon, and read the words of Amu-

Sunday, October 7

Third Day

lek, in the thirty-fourth chapter of Alma, in which he calls upon us to humble ourselves and continue in prayer to the Almighty. He admonishes us to cry unto him over our families, over our flocks, over our herds, over our fields, to seek him daily.

Yes, my brethren and sisters, there is power in prayer. All things are possible through prayer. It was through prayer that the heavens were opened in this dispensation. The prayer of a boy fourteen years of age, in the Sacred Grove, opened a new gospel dispensation, and brought forth a vision of the Father and the Son, as they appeared as glorified heavenly beings before the boy, Joseph.

God help us to pray. In the words of Alma, I close:

Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day. (Alma 37:37.)

God grant that we may so live and so pray, that we may be lifted up at the last day, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President David O. McKay:

Elder Ezra Taft Benson of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just concluded speaking. We are happy to have him mingle with us in this Conference.

The closing song by the Tabernacle Choir will be "Hallelujah," conducted by Elder J. Spencer Cornwall. The closing prayer will be offered by Elder Serge J. Lauper, president of the San Francisco Stake, following which this Conference will stand adjourned until two o'clock this afternoon. Elder Alexander Schreiner has been at the organ.

We commend the members of the Church for cooperating with our officials in the city in keeping the grounds clear of paper and other litter. Please continue this afternoon to use the receptacles which have been conveniently placed for your use. Please do not eat your lunches in this sacred building, even though you are eager to retain seats for this afternoon.

The Tabernacle Choir sang the anthem, "Hallelujah."

President Serge J. Lauper of the San Francisco Stake offered the closing prayer.

Conference adjourned until 2 o'clock p.m.

THIRD DAY

AFTERNOON MEETING

The concluding session of the Conference was held Sunday afternoon, October 7, at 2:00 p.m.

The Salt Lake Mormon Tabernacle Choir furnished the choral singing for this session, under the leadership of J. Spencer Cornwall, with Frank W. Asper at the organ.

President David O. McKay:

At this, the opening of the seventh session of the 127th Semi-Annual Conference of the Church, the Salt Lake City Tabernacle is filled to capacity and overflow meetings are being held in the Assembly Hall and Barratt Hall. These services are also being televised

over KSL-TV, Channel 5, and are being heard over radio station KSL and by arrangement through KSL over 16 radio stations in Utah, Idaho, Colorado, Nevada, California, and Oregon.

The music for this session will be rendered by the Tabernacle Choir, with Elder J. Spencer Cornwall conducting and Elder Frank W. Asper at the organ.

We shall begin this service by the Tabernacle Choir singing, "Great and Marvellous."

The opening prayer will be offered by Elder Scott B. Price, president of the East Ogden Stake.

Singing by the Choir, "Great and Marvellous."