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I am very grateful, my brothers and sisters, for this semiannual opportunity of attending with you the general conference of the Church. What a great privilege it is to come here and be strengthened in our faith and have our thoughts redirected toward the purpose for which the Church was organized in this greatest and last of all the dispensations.

The Lord's reason for bringing us to these valleys in the first place was not primarily to establish us in a condition of wealth and ease, he probably did not intend that we should ever excel as a financial community or as a seat of political influence. We were brought here to build up the kingdom, to send out the message of the restoration to the nations, and to prepare the world for the glorious second coming of Christ. In these fields we must excel.

What a sobering responsibility it is to be entrusted with the message of universal salvation. But with the advantage in knowledge that we have received from our three great volumes of new scripture, supported by our own personal testimonies of the truth, what reason can we possibly give if we do not excel in faith and in education and in Godliness and in honor and in the personal preparation we make for eternal life? To help us to get the motivation and inspiration for this accomplishment is one of the purposes of these great semiannual meetings.

As a part of each conference, the Presidency and other General Authorities of the Church have an inspiring meeting in the upper room of the temple. This conference, as I sat in that historic place, I thought about our pioneer ancestors, who out of their poverty erected the magnificent temple that stands on this block, wherein the sacred ordinances so necessary to our salvation can be performed. But the temple itself is a constant reminder to us to do our duty. It is a kind of symbol of our mission.

All of you, I am sure, have had the thrilling experience at night of looking

up to the lighted spires of the temple as they point us up to God, as if to remind us of the purpose of our lives. To me, one of the most inspirational parts of any church edifice is its spire. The word, "spire" and "inspire" have a close origin and a near common meaning. And as God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts, so we need his inspiration for our accomplishment.

Jesus once explained one source of his strength when he said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." (John 4:34.) Doing God's will is also our greatest possible source of strength. To encourage his disciples to follow him in doing the Father's will, Jesus spoke some lines that I would like to use as a text. He said, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." (*Ibid.*, 4:35.)

Certainly our day is a most urgent time to re-echo that theme. We should lift up our eyes to see our duty and to understand our opportunities; to accept our responsibilities and to put truth in force in our lives. We should lift up our eyes to worship God and to serve our fellow men as the Lord has commanded.

We are, of course, all aware that there are other powerful influences in the world inviting us to look down to the earth. From the pinnacle of the temple, Satan said to Jesus, "Cast thyself down." Satan has been giving that same direction ever since with the most terrifying success. And the first step toward any failure is always merely to look down, to let earthly things absorb our interests. It is pretty difficult to look down and to look up at the same time.

It has been said that one may not always look where he is going, but he will always go where he is looking. If we merely look down long enough, many will be sure to fall.

Back in the days of the old sailing ships, a young, inexperienced seaman was sent aloft in a storm to disentangle a broken rigging from the mainmast.

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First Day

Despite the raging winds he climbed up quickly, and soon his mission was accomplished. But as he started to descend, he looked down, and as he looked down, he became dizzy and frightened. He saw the angry, rolling sea. He felt the quiver of the trembling ship as it was tossed about by the waves. Then he became aware that his grip was weakening, and he cried to those on the deck below that he was about to fall. The captain shouted to him to stop looking down, and heeding his superior's command, he turned his eyes upward and soon regained his balance and self-confidence. Then he was able to make his way safely back to the deck.

The moral dizziness that always comes from looking down is one of our biggest personal problems. It is one of the significant characteristics of our day that as a people we are too much occupied with the things down. The newspapers, magazines, and our own inclinations center our attention on sin, crime, war, and material advantage. Then we get dizzy and confused, and our lives tend to lose their balance.

Here we have the communist example of where leaders of great nations have stopped looking up, and soon they have cast themselves down by centering their life's purposes in evil, including one of the greatest sins which is their attempted enslavement of other nations. When nations or individuals look down and recognize no higher authority than their own, they soon lose their sense of right and wrong. The communist leaders have deliberately destroyed many of their own people, and they would, if they thought they could, deprive every human being in the world of his God-given free agency without a moment's hesitation. They have closed up their churches by governmental decree and now make no pretense of lifting up their eyes, their thoughts, or their activities to God.

At Fulton, Missouri, on March 5, 1946, Winston Churchill said, "A shadow has fallen across the scene so recently lighted by Allied victory. From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent." The communists have erected a vertical curtain, separat-

ing themselves from their fellow men and are thereby violating the second great commandment. But they have also erected a horizontal curtain over their heads, separating themselves from God, and are thereby violating the first and greatest commandment.

But we sometimes accomplish about the same thing individually by allowing the iron curtains of our material interests, our social affairs, and our spiritual indifference to separate us from God and draw our attention away from the main purpose of our lives. It doesn't take very long looking down before we are incapable of doing anything else.

In his *Inferno* Dante gave an account of an imaginary trip through hell. And one group of hell's inmates said to him, "As our eyes intent on earthly things were never lifted up to heaven, so now doth justice fix them down upon the ground. And even as greed destroyed our love for good whereby the labors of our lives were lost, so now doth justice hold us captive here, fettered in close restraint."

We might see a reflection of our situation in John Bunyon's *Pilgrim's Progress* story of the man with the muckrake. Because this man spent his life raking unto himself the chaff and dust of the earth, he had trained himself to look in no direction but down. There was an angel standing over his head with a celestial crown in his hand, offering to exchange the crown for the muckrake. But because this man could look in no direction but down, he disregarded the offer of the angel as he continued to rake unto himself the chaff and muck of the earth.

With a similar situation in mind, Edwin Markham entitled his poetic masterpiece, "The Man with the Hoe." It might have been entitled, "The Man with the Muckrake." It was written under the inspiration of Millet's world-famous painting of a brutalized toiler, representing one who had fallen from the high position in which he had been placed by the Creator. And about this man with an iron curtain over his head, Mr. Markham said:

"Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans

Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the
world.

Who made him dead to rapture and
despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never
hopes,
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?
Who loosened and let down his brutal
jaw?

Whose was the hand that slanted back
this brow?

Whose breath blew out the light within
this brain?

"Is this the Thing the Lord God made
and gave

To have dominion over sea and land;
To trace the stars and search the heavens
for power;

To feel the passion of Eternity?
Is this the dream He dreamed who
shaped the suns

And marked their ways upon the ancient
deep?

Down all the caverns of Hell to their
last gulf

There is no shape more terrible than
this—

More tongued with censure of the
world's blind greed—

More filled with signs and portents for
the soul—

More packt with danger to the universe."

And then Mr. Markham asks:

"O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
How will the future reckon with this
man?

How answer his brute question in that
hour

When whirlwinds of rebellion shake
all shores?

How will it be with kingdoms and with
kings—

With those who shaped him to the
thing he is—

When this dumb Terror shall rise to
judge the world,

After the silence of the centuries?"

We always begin this downward process as soon as we separate ourselves from God in any degree. The first and greatest commandment has to do with our first and greatest need, which is for God. That is, God created us, he gives

us life and breath, he enlightens our minds and quickens our understandings. At this very moment God is sending us energy, food, and vitality from the sun. We do not live on an independent earth. If the sun's rays were turned off for just a few hours, there would be no life left upon this earth. And when men turn their backs on God and obey no higher law than their own, then truth, honor, and fairness lose their meaning. The angel's song of "Peace on earth, good will toward men" is an unintelligible concept to communist philosophy. Their wisest strategy and the point of their greatest excellence is to cause confusion, hatred, and strife among their fellow men. Mr. Mao, the communist dictator in China, recently said that he would welcome an atomic war, and we have every reason to believe that he was being entirely truthful in his declaration.

But as the captain in the storm called to the inexperienced seaman to look up, so the captain of our salvation is calling through the storms of our troubled lives saying that if we would avoid falling, we must look up to God.

We sing a song in which we say:

"Look up, my soul, be not cast down,
Cast not thine eyes upon the ground.
Break off the shackles of the earth,
Receive, my soul, a spirit's birth."

We are not likely to receive the spirit's birth while we are competing with each other in evil. We are born again only when we follow the direction given to our lives by the temple spires and look up to our Heavenly Father. We need to trade in our muckrakes. There is an angel over our heads offering us the celestial kingdom if we will lift up our eyes and our hearts and our voices and our souls unto God. We need to take down our iron curtains and do away with our idleness and indifference. We need to remember the purpose of our lives and give a more enthusiastic response to the Master's invitation so appropriate to our day, wherein he had said, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." (John 4:35.)

That God will help us so to do, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.