

Vandenberg of the Presiding Bishopric will address us.

The Choir and the congregation joined in singing the hymn, "O Say, What Is Truth?"

President David O. McKay:

Bishop John H. Vandenberg, Presiding Bishop of the Church, will now speak to us. He will be followed by Elder William J. Critchlow, Jr.

BISHOP JOHN H. VANDENBERG

Presiding Bishop of the Church

At the turn of the century, President Lorenzo Snow, in addressing the Saints in general conference, said, "Seventy years ago this Church was organized with six members. We commenced so to speak as an infant. . . . Through the blessings of the Lord, however, we managed to move along in our stage of infancy, receiving support from the Lord as he saw proper to give it. . . . We understand very well, when we reflect back upon our own lives, that we did many foolish things when we were boys because of our lack of experience and because we had not learned fully to obey the instructions of our fathers and mothers. We could not then comprehend that it was absolutely necessary for our proper advancement that we should observe the counsels of our parents. Many of us learned it, but too late perhaps to correct ourselves. Yet as we advanced, the experience of the past materially assisted us to avoid such mistakes as we had made in our boyhood.

"It has been so with the Church. . . . When we examine ourselves, . . . we discover that we are still not doing exactly as we ought to do, notwithstanding all our experience. We discern that there are things which we fail to do that the Lord expects us to perform, some of which he required us to do in our boyhood. But we feel thankful and grateful that we are enabled now, . . . to accomplish many things. . . . While we congratulate ourselves in this direction, we certainly ought to feel that we have not yet arrived at perfection. There are many things to do yet." (*Conf. Rep.*, April 1900, pp. 1-2.)

As I was reading President Snow's message to the Church, it was evident to me that the Lord has been good as

well as patient with the Saints. He has set up these conferences wherein his people might be admonished and informed concerning his kingdom.

Now President Snow in his observations referred to some of these matters after the Church had been established for seventy years.

Today with the Church having reached the age of 133 years, we marvel at its growth; and with the strength of its leadership, we are moving forward. Yet as we examine ourselves, we see there is much need for improvement.

I think of the Prophet Isaiah's words when he said: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." (*Isa. 58:1.*)

I observe a great need for the teaching and adherence to the principle of fasting. I would like to say something relative to it. As a Church, we have not reached the full benefits of this principle. There are some who faithfully observe the fast and who receive the full blessings. But there are many who must yet be taught the true principle of fasting and be converted to it and practise it in order to receive the great blessings associated with it.

The Prophet Isaiah clearly sets forth an understanding of the fast. As he observed the people, he was, no doubt, considerably upset and concerned with the way they had abused the purpose and principle of fasting.

He said: ". . . Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours." (*Ibid.*, 58:3.)

A writer says this scripture means that they find pleasure and carry on business and oppress all their laborers.

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With all their professing of self-denial they are selfish.¹

"Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: . . ." (*Ibid.*, 58:4.)

Or in other words as a result they are rewarded with strife, debate, and wickedness.

Isaiah further explains the purposes and blessings concerning the fast. He asks: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?"

"Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" (*Ibid.*, 58:6-7.)

I suppose when he speaks of "loosing the bands of wickedness" of "undoing the heavy burdens," and the "breaking of every yoke" that he is referring to the wickedness of people who think only of themselves in selfishness, vanity, pride, and having hearts so set upon the things of this world that the two great commandments of loving God and loving neighbor are entirely forgotten. The principles of loving thy neighbor and of loving God are encompassed in the true purpose of the fast.

Certainly, it takes no imagination to understand what is meant when he says, ". . . that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

He meant that in addition to taking care of the poor, that we should watch over our own kin and be responsible for our father, mother, brother, and sister when they are in need.

It is here that I would like to state that the Lord has caused a day of fasting and prayer to be set up in this day so that collectively the Church might join together to fulfil the purposes of fasting.

In the general letter from the Council of the Twelve to the Church under date of May 17, 1845, which Orson Pratt read to the Saints, these words appear:

"Let this be an ensample to all saints, and there will never be any lack for bread: When the poor are starving, let those who have, fast one day and give what they otherwise would have eaten to the bishops for the poor, and every one will abound for a long time; and this is one great and important principle of fasts, approved of the Lord. And so long as the saints will all live to this principle, with glad hearts and cheerful countenances they will always have an abundance." (*DHC* 7:413.)

The bishop should frequently encourage the members of his ward to observe the fast day and voluntarily contribute a generous offering. The Lord knows in his wisdom that individually we are generally not prone to seek out the poor, the hungry, and those in need, and individually attend to their needs on a continuing basis. By fasting collectively there is no end to the good that can be done; that no one need suffer; that such assistance as might be given is rendered through the bishop in love and mercy and that full dollar value is rendered without any administrative cost.

Fasting is a voluntary principle. The Lord also said: ". . . it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.

"Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness"; (*D&C* 58:26-27.) Fasting is a principle that all are encouraged to live by—the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the widow and the needy.

President Joseph F. Smith says: "The Lord has instituted the fast on a reasonable and intelligent basis, and none of His works are vain and unwise. His law is perfect in this as in other things. Hence, those who can are required to comply thereto; it is a duty from which they cannot escape; but let it be remembered that the observance of the fast by abstaining twenty-four hours from food and drink is not an absolute rule, it is no iron-clad law to us, but is left with the people as a matter of conscience, to exercise wisdom and dis-

¹The One Volume Bible Commentary, J. R. Dumelow, M. A. Editor, page 449.

cretion. Many are subject to weakness, others are in delicate health, and others have nursing babies; of such it should not be required to fast. I have known children to cry for something to eat on fast day. In such cases, going without food will do them no good. Instead, they dread the day to come, and in place of hailing it, dislike it; while the compulsion engenders a spirit of rebellion in them, rather than a love for the Lord and their fellows. Better teach them the principle, and let them observe it when they are old enough to choose intelligently, than to so compel them." (*Gospel Doctrine*, p. 244.)

I feel to add that those who are not physically able to abstain from food and drink should participate on fast day to the extent of prayers, offerings, and testimony. If we abide by the word of the Lord for the above purposes, we will surely be blessed as God has promised through his prophets. I suppose there is no physical blessing desired so much as being well in mind and in body.

Listen again to Isaiah and this promise, "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: . . ." (Isa. 58:8.) What would this be worth to you? Think of what it means. ". . . and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward." (*Idem.*)

Further, "Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. . . ." (*Ibid.*, 58:9.) What more assurance would we need than this as a promise that we may call upon the Lord and he will answer?

Then Isaiah reiterates: ". . . If thou take away from . . . thee the yoke, (or wickedness) the putting forth of the finger, (or accusing others) and speaking vanity;

"And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day:

"And the Lord shall guide thee continually, (or the Holy Ghost will direct your daily life) and satisfy thy soul in drought, (This is your personal security in times of need and difficulty.) and make fat thy bones: (I believe this has

to do with health. In the bone there is marrow and marrow manufactures the blood that is vital to the strength and well-being of the body.) and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not (or inspiration and wisdom will flow from you continually).

"And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in." (*Ibid.*, 58:9-12.) To me this is a promise to those working with the members of the Church who are in need physically and spiritually, "they that shall be of thee," or that you may be able to help them—to do what? "Build the old waste places," and as you help them to build "thou shalt raise up the foundations of (their) many generations (to follow); and then thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach." In other words, you have helped them overcome their weaknesses, to restore their souls, to bridge the gap through reactivating, rehabilitation, and "restoring" the path for them to walk in.

To those responsible for the leadership of the Saints in every unit of the Church, I say, teach the people the principle of fasting, in love, in gentleness, in firmness, and in humility. Fasting will give them spiritual strength and help them to develop self-control.

President Snow observed in his day a need for maturity, so we today after 133 years should reach manhood in the fast offering program.

Actually as a Church we are not meeting the cash needs of the sick, the naked, and the hungry as we should through the principle of fasting. It is our obligation to teach the Saints this principle in order that they may break the sin of selfishness that their offerings and their blessings may be generous.

Now brothers and sisters, I want to leave with you the desire of my heart in the words of Omni: ". . . I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and pray-

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ing, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved." (Omni 26.) In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President David O. McKay:

He who has just given that excellent

address on fasting is the Presiding Bishop of the Church, Elder John H. Vandenberg.

Elder William J. Critchlow, Jr., Assistant to the Twelve, will now speak to us. He will be followed by Elder Delbert L. Stapley.

ELDER WILLIAM J. CRITCHLOW, JR.

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

In the course of my office day, at about noon of the day, but not every day, I may see through my office window two men, locked arm in arm, striding toward Hotel Utah. One is tall and slender—rather easy to identify—despite his distance from the window. He is President McKay on his way, by escort, to his hotel apartment.

Some day President McKay may let me walk with him to his apartment. Then, with our arms locked tightly together, he could lean on me physically, and thus in very small measure I could compensate him for the many times I have leaned on him spiritually.

Few people will ever have the privilege of locking arms and striding with a prophet, but everyone may have the privilege of following him.

Once President McKay said to me and a few others: "Come—follow me." That invitation came one summer evening several weeks after a thief or thieves had broken into his stable and stolen his saddles. Stake presidents in the Ogden [Utah] area, aware of his loss, purchased a fine saddle, and we had just presented it to him that lovely evening at his Huntsville home.

"Put it in the trunk of my car," he said, and motioning with his hand he bade us, "Come—follow me."

In our several cars we followed his car across town and beyond to a pasture gate. On the way and all the way his words, "Come—follow me," rode with me in my mind, exciting me, challenging me, finally provoking me to make a resolution which I sincerely pray I may have the courage to keep. I give it to you in earnest, simple rhyme, and challenge you to follow suit:

Follow him I will,
All the way;
And to wearied souls,
Along my way,
Take opportunity each
Day to say:
He is God's prophet—
David O. McKay.

President McKay opened the pasture gate, entered alone, and closed the gate. He asked us to stand quietly back a few paces. There was neither sight nor sound of pastured animals—brush obscured our view. Advancing a few paces, he raised his voice and called: "Sonny Boy, Sonny Boy." For moments there was silence, and in that silence I recalled that Sonny Boy was a spirited animal—the men who shod him had warned that he could give anyone a bad time. He gave them one.

Faintly I soon heard the sound of hoofs thudding rapidly upon the sod. The thudding strengthened, growing louder and louder and still louder; and then suddenly, two horses charged around the brush, racing neck to neck straight toward President McKay. I held my breath, fearing that they would trample him before they could check their speed. Doesn't he realize the danger? He did; he knew exactly what the horses would do; he didn't even budge; the experience was not new to him or to the horses.

Now picture this in your minds: President McKay with his arm over Sonny Boy's neck, both horses nuzzling him searchingly—horse kisses they may have been; I wouldn't know—but this I do know: rubbing noses is an accepted mode of greeting down New Zealand