

Again he said to the Prophet (and these instructions apply to the things of which I have spoken, as well as the teachings of all the brethren who will speak in this conference): "Hearken ye to these words. Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Treasure these things up in your hearts, and let the solemnities of eternity rest upon your minds." (D&C 43:34.)

Our first commitment

To love God with all our heart, might, mind, and strength is our first and most important commitment. Without our eternal God, who is the Father of our spirits, we would not exist. With his love for us and our love for him, everything concerning our eternal welfare and happiness will fit into proper perspective to guide us to that eternal kingdom where God and Christ dwell.

The final words of the commandment, the theme of this presentation, should be etched in our souls forever: "and in the name of Jesus Christ thou shalt serve him." (D&C 59:5.) The service we render to God and his children through his Son, Jesus Christ, with love and with all our heart, might, mind, and strength will bring us the exaltation we hopefully are striving to achieve.

May this commandment—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, mind, and strength, and in the name of Jesus Christ thou shalt serve him"—always have primacy in our lives, I pray humbly in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Joseph Fielding Smith

We will now hear from Bishop John H. Vandenberg, Presiding Bishop of the Church.

Bishop John H. Vandenberg

Presiding Bishop of the Church

The goodness of our Father in heaven is especially evident at this season as we again witness another great harvest. The planting has been done, the growing season is over, and now the harvest is in process.

Recently, I was in Magic Valley, Idaho. While there I visited three welfare farms that are operated by the wards of the Church in that area. I was impressed by the way in which these farms were being managed. The bounteous crops evidenced the fact that the farms were being cared for properly. It appeared that there would be an excellent harvest.

As we drove away from these farms, however, we noticed a beet field that was overgrown with weeds. It seemed to have had little or no care. Because of the evident neglect, it was clear that the harvest would be minimal, if indeed there would be a harvest at all.

Fields reflect life

I thought then how much these fields reflect what can happen to us in our own lives.

When we plant seeds of righteousness and daily rid our lives of weeds, we reap a harvest of satisfaction, happiness, and even eternal joy. But when, because of neglect, we allow weeds to grow and canker our lives, we can reap less abundantly and perhaps even harvest sorrow and discontent. Some years ago, I read a homely verse printed in a seed company publication that builds on this analogy:

"When I put on my worn-out tweeds
And with my hands pull garden weeds,
The likeness always comes to mind,
'Tween weeds and sins of human kind.

"For weeds will grow up anywhere
In ground that's either foul or fair,
And when you pull them, you're not
through;
They'll grow right up again for you.

"Some weeds have roots so great in
length
That pulling them is test of strength,
And they should be removed with care
Or they'll kill good plants anywhere.

"It makes no difference where you go

There's no place that the weeds can't grow;
Some folks keep weeding, others won't,
Some folks have gardens, others don't.

"So weeds and sin are quite the same
In growth and action, not in name;
But different is their origin:
God makes the weeds, we make the sin."

It is important to realize that we make our "garden" or, in this case, our life just what it is.

Law of the harvest

It has been said that "man has two creators, his God and himself. The first creator furnishes him the raw materials for his life. . . . The second creator—himself—has marvelous powers he rarely realizes. It is what a man makes of himself that counts." (William George Jordan.)

No factor in life is more vital to living than the realization that you and I are, in the final analysis, our own creators. This principle is often referred to as the law of the harvest. ". . . whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Gal. 6:7.)

This is a law that affects each of our lives. If we plant seeds of righteousness and cultivate them properly, we reap peace, joy, and exaltation; but conversely, if we plant seeds of avarice, hate, and lust, we reap the whirlwind of sorrow and anguish.

Each year as the farmer surveys his land, plants his field, organizes his work, he contemplates having a rich harvest. So should it be in our personal lives and especially so with those who have been called to serve as spiritual leaders. I do not know whether the impact of the wisdom of President David O. McKay's counsel to the stake presidents and bishops has found its mark as yet. He said:

"The spirituality of a ward will be commensurate with the activity of the youth in that ward. The president of the priests quorum is the bishop, by ordination, and it is his duty to have the confidence of those young men and girls of corresponding ages, for they will mold the moral atmosphere of his ward."

Harvest of spirituality

A bishop who considers seriously this counsel will have a rich harvest of spirituality and devotion in his ward. As with all programs and directions given by our Church leaders, we can only harvest the benefits by utilizing the various inspired programs. One charted way to involve the youth is through the bishop's youth activity committee, which is outlined in the *Aaronic Priesthood-Youth Handbook*.

An example of the harvest reaped by a bishop who is taking up the cause and is involving the young men and young women of his ward in the spiritual quest has been reported firsthand to the Presiding Bishopric by a young man and a young woman who are participating in this experience. Under the confidence of the bishop the young people of this ward are saying, "Bishop, this is what we want to do. (1) Under your direction we would like to take a program to the homebound members of our ward. (2) With your permission, we would also like to present the program in sacrament meeting each fifth Sunday; and with your help we'd like to plan the first program around the theme of obedience. (3) For Christmas we'd like to repair toys and make cakes for some of the less fortunate members of our ward. (4) We'd also like to clear the weeds away from the intersections in the neighborhood."

With them it is no longer a program in which they wait for the adults to plan for them. With proper guidance, they are performing above and beyond what is generally expected of them.

Youth involvement

A partial reference to youth involvement is alluded to in the September issue of *The Improvement Era*. (See *Era of Youth*, pp. 50-51.) The harvest that can be reaped by such activity has also been described by a young man who was called to serve on such a committee. In his testimony to the other young people of his ward, he said, in part:

"The Aaronic Priesthood-Youth (activity) committee in the . . . Church is organized to give the youth responsi-

bility in planning and executing their own activities. With this responsibility will come a growth, a growth that will prepare every young Latter-day Saint boy to hold with dignity, honor, and worthiness the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood.

"There's one difference between us and any other youth organization. We do things the Lord's way and not the way we think is best. Our Savior tells us that our Father's house is a house of order; and the priesthood is the way his house is ordered. With our Father's authority the youth of today will plan and organize our lives to serve our fellowmen and to love the Lord our God with all our heart, might, mind, and strength, and be eternally obedient to the laws and principles that he has given to us, that one day our Father in heaven might say to each of us, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.' " (Daniel William Hunter.)

Development of youth

Another bishop indicated that by implementing the bishop's youth activity committee in his ward, several young people were brought into activity. Perhaps even more significant, under the confidence of the bishop, he said, the youth are assuming the responsibility for their own activities. Certainly for such a bishop there will be not only the harvest of greater spirituality, but also the additional dividend that comes from the development of the youth, since they will usually set their own standards of performance higher for themselves than adults would have done.

For a father, the situation is the same. He will reap joy and happiness if he cultivates and develops his children through family home evenings and other family-centered activities and if he has sufficient confidence in his children to give them responsibility for their activities.

As the youth are involved in meaningful responsibilities, they will rise to meet the challenge. Today's youth need specific guidance because of our complex society, which offers many alternatives for both excellence and mediocrity. They must catch the vision

and requirement of an abundant harvest in their own lives.

Example of King Saul

The law of the harvest is irrevocable in any phase of life. With the simplicity of this law, it is paradoxical that some people have not learned to live their lives accordingly. King Saul offers a tragic example of a man who, in his personal life, failed to learn this simple, yet profound, lesson of life. Unwisely, Saul began to sow pride and hate, feeling he was above the law. Saul could have been a great king; however, he soon began to reap the product of sowing hate and pride. He found from bitter experience that men's "works do follow them." (Rev. 14:13.)

While the operation of the law of the harvest brought pain and anguish to Saul, it conversely will bring blessings and joy to those who sow and cultivate seeds of righteousness. The Lord has declared that "there is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—

"And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated." (D&C 130:20-21.)

It is by this law that the bishop I previously referred to reaped the blessing of increased spirituality in his ward through obedience to truth, as directed by our Prophet.

Freedom to discipline self

In this world of turmoil, as we look at what the harvest will be for our personal lives, these words of Bernard M. Baruch hold great meaning: "The only freedom man can ever have is the freedom to discipline himself. That is what we are fighting for, to maintain our right to self discipline instead of having the discipline of slavery and tyranny thrust upon us by a conquering enemy."

Scholars often point to the great battles of history and indicate how the fate of the world is shaped by the outcome. Such battles were fought at Waterloo, Concord, Gettysburg, and Normandy. However, after careful

analysis one must conclude that the great and determining battles are fought within the soul of man.

No more meaningful battle has been fought than when Christ in Gethsemane placed the will of his Father paramount, in order to bring about the salvation of mankind. The planting of the seeds of his gospel have brought hope, peace, and the opportunity for exaltation.

We can look also to Moses in the plains of Midian, Paul on the road to Damascus, or Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove. Each of these men made decisions that not only altered the course of his own life, but also the course of mankind.

Decisions determine harvest

Each day of our own lives we are faced with similar decisions. Though they may not seem as dramatic as a Gethsemane or a Sacred Grove, they nevertheless determine the ultimate course of our lives. It is the culmination of our day-to-day decisions and actions that determines whether we will reap a harvest of peace in this life and life eternal, or unhappiness.

Just as the seemingly little sins of Saul culminated in a life of sorrow and tragedy, so the life filled with the day-to-day acts of righteousness will reap a life of peace, joy, and even exaltation. Nowhere is this principle taught more effectively than in these words of the Savior:

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

"And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

"And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

"For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me

drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

"Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

"Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

"When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

"Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

"And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matt. 25:31-40.)

We reap as we sow

We are, in a very real way, our own creators. We reap that which we have sown, and we receive our wages of "eternal happiness or eternal misery, according to the spirit which [we] listed to obey, whether it be a good spirit or a bad one. For every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey. . . ." (Al. 3:26-27.) In other words, we decide by our day-to-day actions what our harvest will be. As with the farms I saw in the Magic Valley of Idaho, it can be a bounteous harvest or it can be a patch of weeds.

May we sow only righteousness, while continuing to rid our lives of the weeds of evil, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Joseph Fielding Smith

The congregation and chorus will now join in singing "High on the Mountain Top," and after the singing Elder Milton R. Hunter of the First Council of Seventy will be our speaker.

The congregation sang the hymn, "High on the Mountain Top."
