

Bishop Victor L. Brown

Of the Presiding Bishopric

My brothers and sisters, it is my desire and hope that I might say something meaningful to those who find themselves confused, discouraged, and lost in this mixed-up world—something that will give each one encouragement and faith that there is a way to find oneself. The solution is not found in sophisticated, high-sounding formulas but in the simple, plain truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the only true and lasting pathway to real peace and happiness in life.

Prison graduation exercise

I recently witnessed the evidence of this truth in a most unusual setting. May I share it with you? In June of this year I was invited to attend a graduation exercise conducted by the LDS Institute of Religion and Church Social Services Department held at the Utah State Prison. Seventeen men received certificates of award: nine received their first-year certificates, five their second-year, and three their third. Twenty-four others had participated in religion classes but did not quite qualify for certificates.

As I recall, only two had been released from prison and had returned that evening to receive their certificates. All of the others were inmates. Many of them were not members of the Church.

One would hardly expect in the environment of the prison to hear the beautiful, stirring hymns "I Need Thee Every Hour" and "Sweet Hour of Prayer." They were sung by two choruses composed of white and black prisoners.

Men dressed in prison uniforms offered humble, sincere prayers to God, expressing gratitude for their blessings and for the knowledge they now have of his gospel. Several stood at the pulpit and testified that they know God lives, and expressed gratitude for his goodness to them. May I tell you of just two of these men—men whose lives were seriously out of step with society; men with internal, personal problems that really are not much different from those of many who have never been in prison. I shall not identify them by their real names.

Story of Jim

The first one we will call Jim. Jim comes from a distant state. He is a fine-looking, clean-cut young man not quite thirty years old. He was one of those who opposed the establishment and society in general. He came from a broken home. He had experienced no love in his life. He left home at age seventeen and joined the army. After release from the military, he wandered about the country without goal or purpose in life, finally finding himself in Salt Lake City. He was involved in a theft, arrested, convicted, and sent to prison. He escaped one day, was recaptured, and was placed in maximum security. In his words, "I came out of maximum security and returned to medium, and still did not know what to do with my life."

One of the prisoners, knowing of some of the turmoil Jim was going through, sent him to see the LDS chaplain. This was the beginning of a completely new experience in Jim's

life. Even though he found himself in prison, he had taken the first step to a freedom he had not known existed.

After a few weeks of exposure to the program of the Church specially designed for prison life, he said he was able to give up smoking. He became involved in the various religious programs sponsored by the Church social service agency. He said, "I haven't smoked a cigarette since that day. I haven't had a cup of coffee since December of last year." He goes on to tell of the good feeling of accomplishment in overcoming bad personal habits.

He also tells about the family home evening program conducted by his home teachers. He explained that he would have given up in discouragement many times had it not been for this wonderful couple who had been assigned as his home teachers. He said they actually loved him as a son, something he had never experienced in his life, even as a little boy. In his own words: "I have been in this program since June 16, 1970. For these sixteen months, I probably made more changes in my life—inside these walls away from the rat race of society—that I know are going to determine my whole future more than the first twenty-three years of my life before prison. I had no idea at all what the LDS people were or what the Church was until I went to prison.

"I am not proud of being in prison, but I am proud of my experience while being there. I am proud of being a graduate of the program that the LDS people have offered to the inmates at the prison."

This is the young man who conducted the graduation exercises and did it in a most impressive manner. His goal now is to finish paying his

debt to society in order to be released from prison so that he might prepare for baptism and membership in the Church.

Conversion of Ed

And now about Ed. Ed also comes from a distant city. Ed started stealing when he was nine. He was arrested for auto theft at age thirteen, later convicted of grand larceny, and sent to prison in another state. He came to Utah, was arrested for and convicted of grand larceny again, and was sent to the Utah State Prison.

Ed became acquainted with the Church social services program conducted in the prison in much the same way as Jim. Once when Ed was on his way to one of the Church meetings, some of the prisoners ridiculed him, as only hardened convicts could. He responded that when he was on the outside he had acted as they did. Now he wanted to change and no one was going to stop him.

Ed had some particularly wonderful home teachers who occasionally brought their own children to the prison to have family home evening with him. The children consider Ed as an older brother. He considers himself a member of their family. Ed was one of those who had been released from prison and had returned to receive his certificate at the graduation exercises. He was invited to speak at the service.

As he stood at the pulpit, he took a piece of paper from his pocket. Holding it up to the audience, he said: "You probably can't read this, but this is the most important document in my life. This is my baptismal recommend that will permit me to be baptized next Thursday." Ed was baptized. After his confirmation, he walked over to a corner of the room where he

could be alone and wept. He wept even more when he was ordained a deacon in the Aaronic Priesthood.

The way to freedom

What conclusions can we draw from this? Certainly these young men were faced with serious problems. Yes, they had lost their physical freedom by being confined in jail, but this was not the basic problem. Even more serious was the lack of purpose in their lives. They had no place to go. They were lost. Life had no meaning. They had no idea why they were here on earth or where they were going.

Release from the prison would not begin to solve their most urgent problems; and yet, in the environment of prison, they found the release that could ultimately make them truly free men. They found their Savior, Jesus Christ, and his gospel.

There are many who find themselves in circumstances similar to those of Jim and Ed—not necessarily confined to a correctional institution, but nevertheless in prison, a prison

from which legal authorities cannot release them, a prison of personal habits such as alcohol, drugs, immorality, selfishness, dishonesty, laziness, aimlessness; yes, these can be more confining and damning than any state prison. Yet there is a way to escape to a freedom that surpasses anything designed by man—the kind of freedom Jim and Ed have found.

This freedom can only be found by accepting the divine plan and keeping the commandments of him who gave his life for each of us that we might find eternal life—even Jesus Christ. For did he not say: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"? (John 8:32.) In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President N. Eldon Tanner

Elder A. Theodore Tuttle of the First Council of Seventy will now address us. He will be followed by Elder Sterling W. Sill, Assistant to the Twelve.

Elder A. Theodore Tuttle

Of the First Council of the Seventy

Some years ago, I read an editorial in the *Deseret News* entitled "The Mechanical Rabbit." I quote:

"Most of our readers must have smiled the other day when they read of the greyhounds in Britain who don't know a rabbit when they see one. So long had they chased a mechanical rabbit around the racetrack, that when a real rabbit bounded across the track, the dogs didn't give it a second look.

"Stupid, eh? But sad too, this perverting of the natural instincts. . . .

"We chase mechanical rabbits, too.

"We chase paychecks, and don't give a second look to the glint of the rising sun on a snow-topped peak.

"We chase our way through the appointments of a crowded desk calendar, and fail to take time to chat with the next-door neighbor or to drop in on a sick friend.

We chase social pleasures on a glittering, noisy treadmill—and ignore the privilege of a quiet hour telling bedtime stories to an innocent-eyed child.

"We chase prestige and wealth, and don't recognize the real opportunities for joy that cross our paths. . . ."