
Without announcement, the Tabernacle Choir sang the number, "Sing Unto God."

President Harold B. Lee

Bishop H. Burke Peterson of the Presiding Bishopric of the Church has just spoken to us. If you parents have been listening, you have an excellent basis for a wonderful family home evening in teaching your children how to pray. Thank you, Bishop.

The Tabernacle Choir has sung "Sing Unto God" by Handel.

The choir and the congregation will now join in singing "Redeemer of Israel."

Following the singing, Elder Marion D. Hanks, Assistant to the

Council of the Twelve, will speak to us.

The congregation and choir sang the hymn, "Redeemer of Israel."

President Lee

To those of the television and radio audience who have just joined us, we announce that we are gathered in the Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah in the first session of the 143rd Semi-Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Elder Marion D. Hanks, Assistant to the Council of the Twelve, will now address us. Elder Hanks will be followed by Elder James E. Faust, Assistant to the Twelve.

Elder Marion D. Hanks

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

After a meeting with a group of students recently one young man waited to ask a question. "Elder Hanks," he said, "what are *your* goals? What do *you* want to accomplish?" I observed his seriousness of purpose and answered in the same spirit that my strongest desire is to qualify to be a friend of Christ.

I had not responded to such a question just that way before, but the answer did put into words the deep yearnings of my heart.

Friendship of God

In ancient times Abraham was called the "friend of God." Jesus, shortly before his crucifixion, said to his disciples, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants . . . but I have called you friends. . . ." (John 15: 14-15.)

In 1832, to a group of elders returning from missionary service, he repeated the message: ". . . from henceforth I shall call you friends. . . ." (D&C 84:77.)

Lesson of forgiveness

Today I would like to speak of one lesson among many that he taught us and that you and I must learn if we are to merit his friendship.

Christ's love was so pure that he gave his life for us: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13.) But there was another gift he bestowed while he was on the cross, a gift that further measured the magnitude of his great love: he forgave, and asked his Father to forgive, those who persecuted and crucified him.

Was this act of forgiveness less difficult than sacrificing his mortal life?

Was it less a test of his love? I do not know the answer. But I have felt that the ultimate form of love for God and men is forgiveness.

He met the test. What of us? Perhaps we shall not be called upon to give our lives for our friends or our faith (though perhaps some shall), but it is certain that every one of us has and will have occasion to confront the other challenge. What will we do with it? What *are* we doing with it?

Someone has written: ". . . the withholding of love is the negation of the spirit of Christ, the proof that we never knew him, that for us he lived in vain. It means that he suggested nothing in all our thoughts, that he inspired nothing in all our lives, that we were not once near enough to him to be seized with the spell of his compassion for the world."

Christ's example and instructions to his friends are clear. He forgave, and he said: ". . . Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Matt. 5:44.)

Response to offenses

What is our response when we are offended, misunderstood, unfairly or unkindly treated, or sinned against, made an offender for a word, falsely accused, passed over, hurt by those we love, our offerings rejected? Do we resent, become bitter, hold a grudge? Or do we resolve the problem if we can, forgive, and rid ourselves of the burden?

The nature of our response to such situations may well determine the nature and quality of our lives, here and eternally. A courageous friend, her faith refined by many afflictions, said to me only hours ago, "Humiliation must come before exaltation."

Forgiveness required

It is required of us to forgive. Our

salvation depends upon it. In a revelation given in 1831 the Lord said:

"My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened.

"Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin.

"I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men." (D&C 64:8-10.)

Therefore, Jesus taught us to pray, "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." (See Matt. 6:14-15.)

Does it not seem a supreme impudence to ask and expect God to forgive when we do not forgive?—openly? and "in our hearts"?

The Lord affirms in the Book of Mormon that we bring ourselves under condemnation if we do not forgive. (See Mosiah 26:30-31.)

But not only our eternal salvation depends upon our willingness and capacity to forgive wrongs committed against us. Our joy and satisfaction in this life, and our true freedom, depend upon our doing so. When Christ bade us turn the other cheek, walk the second mile, give our cloak to him who takes our coat, was it to be chiefly out of consideration for the bully, the brute, the thief? Or was it to relieve the one aggrieved of the destructive burden that resentment and anger lay upon us?

Separation from God

Paul wrote to the Romans that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:39.)

I am sure this is true. I bear testimony that this is true. But it is also true that we can *separate ourselves* from his spirit. In Isaiah it is written: ". . . your iniquities have separated between you

and your God. . . ." (Isa. 59:2.) Again, ". . . they have rewarded evil unto themselves." (Isa. 3:9.)

Through Helaman we learn that "whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself . . ." (Hel. 14:30); and from Benjamin, ". . . ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord. . ." (Mosiah 2:36.)

In every case of sin this is true. Envy, arrogance, unrighteous dominion—these canker the soul of one who is guilty of them. It is true also if we fail to forgive. Even if it appears that another may be deserving of our resentment or hatred, none of us can afford to pay the price of resenting or hating, because of what it does to us. If we have felt the gnawing, mordant inroads of these emotions, we know the harm we suffer.

So Paul taught the Corinthians that they must "see that none render evil for evil unto any man. . ." (1 Thess. 5:15.)

It is reported that President Brigham Young once said that he who takes offense when no offense was intended is a fool, and he who takes offense when offense *was* intended is usually a fool. It was then explained that there are two courses of action to follow when one is bitten by a rattlesnake. One may, in anger, fear, or vengeance, pursue the creature and kill it. Or he may make full haste to get the venom out of his system. If we pursue the latter course we will likely survive, but if we attempt to follow the former, we may not be around long enough to finish it.

Examples of forgiveness

Years ago on Temple Square I heard a boy pour out the anguish of his troubled heart and make a commitment to God. He had been living in a spirit of hatred toward a man who had criminally taken the life of his father. Nearly bereft of his senses with grief, he had been overcome with bitterness.

On that Sabbath morning when others and I heard him, he had been

touched by the Spirit of the Lord, and in that hour through the pouring in of that spirit had flooded out the hostility that had filled his heart. He tearfully declared his determined intent to leave vengeance to the Lord and justice to the law. He would no longer hate the one who had caused the grievous loss. He would forgive and would not for another hour permit the corrosive spirit of vengefulness to fill his heart.

Sometime later, touched with the remembrance of that moving Sabbath morning, I told the story to a group of people in another city. Before I left that small community the next day I had a visit from a man who had heard the message and understood it. Later a letter came from him. He had gone home that night and prayed and prepared himself and had then made a visit to the place of a man in his community who had years before imposed upon the sanctity of his home. There had been animosity and revenge in his heart and threats made. That evening when it was made known that he was at the door, his frightened neighbor appeared with a weapon in his hand. The man quickly explained the reasons for his visit, that he had come to say that he was sorry, that he did not want hatred to continue to consume his life. He offered forgiveness and sought forgiveness and went his way in tears, a free man for the first time in years. He left a former adversary also in tears, shaken and repentant.

The next day the same man went to the home of a relative in the town. He said, "I came to ask your forgiveness. I don't even remember why we have been so long angry, but I have come to tell you that I am sorry and to beg your pardon and to say that I have learned how foolish I have been." He was invited in to join the family at their table, and was reunited with his kin.

When I heard his story I knew again the importance of qualifying ourselves for the forgiveness of Christ by forgiving.

Strength to forebear

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote: "The truth of Christ's teaching seems to be this: In our own person and fortune, we should be ready to accept and pardon all; it is our cheek we are to turn and our coat we are to give to the man who has taken our cloak. But when another's face is buffeted, perhaps a little of the lion will become us best. That we are to suffer others to be injured and stand by, is not conceivable and surely not desirable."

So there are times when, in defense of others and principle, we must act. But of ourselves, if we suffer injury or unkindness, we must pray for the strength to forebear.

Christ gave his life on a cross; and on that cross he fully, freely forgave. It is a worthy goal to seek to qualify for the friendship of such a one.

Addison's comment

More than 250 years ago Joseph Addison printed in *The Spectator* a paragraph of sobering thoughtfulness:

"When I look upon the tombs of the great, every emotion of envy dies in me; when I read the epitaphs of the beautiful, every inordinate desire goes out; when I meet with the grief of parents upon a tombstone, my heart melts with compassion; when I see the tombs

of the parents themselves, I consider the vanity of grieving for those whom we must quickly follow; when I see kings lying by those who deposed them, when I consider rival wits placed side by side, or the men that divided the world with their contests and disputes, I reflect with sorrow and astonishment on the little competitions, factions, and debates of mankind. When I read the several dates of the tombs, of some that died yesterday, and some six hundred years ago, I consider that great Day when we shall all of us be contemporaries, and make our appearance together."

God help us to rid ourselves of resentment and pettiness and foolish pride; to love, and to forgive, in order that we may be friends with ourselves, with others, and with the Lord.

"... even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." (Col. 3:13.)

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Harold B. Lee

Elder Marion D. Hanks, Assistant to the Twelve, has just spoken to us. Here is a man who has been a friend to so many of our youth. The Lord bless his name to be always in their minds.

Elder James E. Faust, Assistant to the Twelve, will now address us. He will be followed by Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Council of the Twelve.

Elder James E. Faust

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

My beloved brothers and sisters and friends: Because of a great desire to be understood, I have humbly prayed for the Spirit of the Lord, and I also earnestly seek your sustaining spirit in what I have to say.

A dad who cares

Recently a father of a family of six children, who has had the sole responsibility for raising the family, beginning when the youngest was in