

President N. Eldon Tanner

First Counselor in the First Presidency

As I sat here looking over this great body of priesthood holders in this historic Tabernacle, I tried to visualize the thousands of men and boys in the Assembly Hall, the Salt Palace, the Marriott Center in Provo, and other buildings throughout Canada and the United States and elsewhere in the world. I was greatly impressed, and almost overwhelmed, with the realization of the great power and authority assembled to listen to the prophet's voice and to hear the word of the Lord, to be built up and motivated to even better works and living.

This is the greatest body of men ever assembled. It is a tremendous privilege and heavy responsibility to stand before you. I pray that the Spirit of the Lord will continue with us as I speak to you this evening.

Expression of appreciation

First, I wish to express my appreciation for the very fine crop of young men who are in the Church and who have been chosen to hold the priesthood of God and to be leaders among all nations and for how they are preparing themselves for this very purpose— young men who realize who they are and what their responsibilities are and who are living worthy to go on missions, to be leaders in the Church and in their communities. I realize how difficult it is in this day for young men and young women to overcome the evils of the world, to honor the priesthood, and appreciate their membership in the church of Jesus Christ.

Repent

There are some who are having problems, and to them I appeal in the name of the Lord to repent and walk uprightly, to keep themselves free from sin, and prepare themselves to enjoy the blessings of the faithful. You have been

chosen and permitted to come forth in this day. Our priesthood is very important, and our task is enormous. Nothing will bring greater joy and success than to live according to the teachings of the gospel. Be an example; be an influence for good; be prepared and worthy to accept any call that comes from the Lord.

Every one of us has been foreordained for some work as His chosen servant on whom he has seen fit to confer the priesthood and power to act in his name. Always remember that people are looking to you for leadership and you are influencing the lives of individuals either for good or for bad, which influence will be felt for generations to come.

Our great responsibility might be more emphatically stated or clearly understood if we realize that there is only one member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for approximately every 999,000 people in the world and only one member of this church per every 333 Christians, approximately.

There are more priesthood holders in the world today than ever before in the history of mankind, with greater power and influence, and of equally great importance, and with greater challenges and problems to meet. The world needs that power and strength and influence to give leadership in helping to meet, solve and overcome the problems caused by the wickedness so rampant in the world.

Magnify your calling

The Lord has set up his church in these the latter days to do just that. The future progress of the Church, and, in fact, the future of the world, depends on how we magnify the office we hold in the priesthood. Every deacon, every teacher, every priest, every holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood has an

individual responsibility and privilege to combine forces with the Savior in being tools in his hands and helping him to accomplish his work and his glory, which is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. No other people have this same authority or special call.

Honor the Priesthood

It is hard to imagine and impossible to calculate the tremendous influence we would have if every one of us would honor his priesthood, and magnify his calling, and really try every day and in every way to use his influence to meet the onslaught of Satan. Too many of us seem to take the priesthood which we hold for granted; we fail to realize what the Lord expects of us, or we don't have the conviction, courage, and fortitude to stand up for the right and be counted, to be different when necessary.

Influence for good

One young boy on the school ground can wield a mighty influence for good. One young man on the football team, or the campus, or among his fellow workers can, by living the gospel, honoring his priesthood, and taking a stand for the right, do untold good. Often you will experience much criticism and ridicule even by those who believe as you do, even though they may respect you for doing right. But remember that the Savior himself was tormented, ridiculed, spat upon, and finally crucified because he would not waver in his conviction. Have you ever stopped to think what would have happened had he weakened and said, "Oh, what's the use?" and abandoned his mission? Do we want to be quitters, or do we want to be valiant servants in spite of all the opposition and evil in the world? Let us have the courage to stand up and be counted as true, devoted followers of Christ.

Many called, but few chosen

Someone said to me the other day, "Why is it that people who know what they should do and seem to have a testimony of the gospel are not prepared to live it and haven't the courage and strength to stand up against opposition?" My reply was, "There are many reasons, it seems to me, that cause people to favor and to do things which are contrary to their teachings and contrary to their beliefs." Then I referred him to two or three scriptures.

"Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?"

"Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—

"That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven." (D&C 121:34-36.)

The last days

The next: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

"For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

"Without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

"Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." (2 Tim. 3:1-5.)

And finally:

"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue:

"For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." (John 12:42-43.)

It is this last passage with which I should like to deal this evening.

Choose the right

I wonder how many of us are guilty of this or any of these, and if so, are we ready tonight to change our ways, and repent, and try to be worthy of the praise of God and his blessings rather than forget who we are and try to be popular? How important it is that we remember who we are, servants of the Lord, and then act accordingly.

As I said before, we just cannot imagine or calculate in any way what a great influence for good we would have in the world if every holder of the priesthood would magnify his calling, and how much happier and more successful each individual would be if he would always choose the right. How sad it is to see one who would rather be popular than do what he knows is right. I have in mind and remember so well a good member of the Church who was elected to the legislature but who wanted to be a good fellow, popular with everyone. He, wanting to be popular, let down his standards and took one drink at a social and then another. It happened again and again. He began drinking with the fellows at lunch and at dinner. And then, unintentionally I am sure, and contrary to his greatest desire, he became an alcoholic and lost the support of his constituency and the respect of his friends and family who loved him and sorrowed for him. He died an early death as an alcoholic. What a sad situation—all because he sought the praise of men more than the praise of God.

This is not a single case. We have examples of congressmen and senators who have lost their positions and self-respect and the respect of others because they wanted to be popular or didn't have the strength to resist the temptations. We have the promise of the Lord that if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things will be added unto us, meaning, of course, the things that are for our good.

Live up to your standards

Let us always remember that people expect us to live up to our standards and respect us much more when we do, even though they may entice us to do otherwise.

I want to bear my testimony that I was never embarrassed in any way, when in the government, or industry, or in my private life, by trying to live up to the teachings of the gospel. Nor was I impeded in any way in my progress. On the contrary, I feel that I was respected and I was blessed by the Lord, and always felt free to call upon him for strength and guidance, which I often received.

My observation is that the Lord keeps his promise to all those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Be on constant guard

It is most important that we be on guard all the time and never abandon our standards in order to be popular or to enjoy the praise of men. One of the General Authorities, whom I will call George, was telling an experience he had when a priest. A friend of his was taking his girl home from a party, and her younger sister was going with them. He asked George to accompany them. George accepted. He said that shortly after they arrived home and were sitting in the living room together, the girl whom he took home went over, turned off the lights, came back and sat on his lap, and started to make advances. He said that though he knew he would be unpopular and even offensive, he excused himself, got up, and went home. As he was telling the story, he said that he knew that many young men today would consider him a sissy, but he remembered so well the story of Joseph who was sold into Egypt.

"And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within.

"And she [Potiphar's wife] caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out." (Gen. 39:11-12.)

We remember how he was made to suffer for this but how the Lord blessed him.

Then George said: "I shudder to think what might have happened if I had stayed with her and have concluded many times that I might never have been here as a servant of the Lord."

As I told this story to a young man one day, his response was, "That action surely took guts, didn't it?" I have thought since how true it is that to do right under similar circumstances does take guts or backbone or willpower, while to succumb shows weakness. Even the strongest must always be on guard.

It is at times like this that our decisions and actions often determine the course of our lives. Young men and some adults have trials or tests of this nature. There are different kinds of temptations where their loyalty and strength of character are really tested. If we will always remember who we are and that God is watching over us, we will be able to shun, or avoid and withstand such temptations. Always remember that you cannot play with fire without danger of being burned.

Though it is important that we make a living for our families, and as good citizens participate in community affairs, we must not become so involved in the things of the world that we forget or neglect our duty and responsibility as called and chosen children of God and holders of his priesthood. Unless we are continually on guard we will find ourselves gradually off the straight and narrow path until we have completely gone astray, becoming a great disappointment to ourselves, our families, and the Lord, and certainly not what we had anticipated or intended or wanted to be.

We find examples of this so often where a person, forgetting who he is, wants to be popular with his peers and wants their praise. So often athletes get

so carried away with their success and desire for praise that they forget their duty to God and the importance of his approval and as a result lose their way. This applies equally to politicians, members of fraternal organizations, professions, and business. This craving for praise and popularity too often controls actions, and as they succumb they find themselves bending their character when they think they are only taking a bow.

Seeking the praise of man

Someone said to me the other day when we were talking about this that those who constantly love the praise of men more than the praise of God are faint reflections of another—meaning Satan, of course—who in the pre-existence wanted to save all mankind, but with one condition attached—that the honor and glory go to him, not to God. He was more concerned with credit than with results; glory and praise were the end in themselves. My friend went on to say that on the crucial issues, if individuals are more concerned with pleasing men than pleasing God, then they suffer from the same virus Satan had, for there are many situations where seeking the praise of men will clearly result in their hurting, not helping, mankind for they will do expedient and temporary things instead of those which are lasting and beneficial.

How much more satisfying it is when we receive the praise of God, knowing that it is fully justified and that his love and respect for us will persist, when usually the praise of men is fleeting and most disappointing.

It is shocking and appalling indeed to those who believe in the teachings of Christ to see how people in high places, in order to enjoy the praise of those who are so vocal in encouraging and promoting immorality, do not take a stand against these evils and promote the teachings of Christ which are so clearly stated in these words in the Ten

Commandments: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." (Exod. 20:14.)

And then in 1 Corinthians we read: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind." (1 Cor. 6:9.)

Stand for right

We also find legislation having been passed and being passed legalizing these very things contrary to the will of the Lord. It is permissive legislation of the worst kind. Brethren, the Lord expects us as his priesthood holders to take a stand for right and do all in our power to oppose and discourage such action and to encourage our people to live according to the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I quote from Elder Neal Maxwell:

"The leader who is willing to say things that are hard to bear, but which are true and which need to be said, is the leader who truly loves his people and who is kind to them. Nothing is more cruel than that leader who, in order to have the praise and plaudits of his followers, entices them from safety into the swamp out of which some may never return. The straight and narrow way is just that—straight and narrow. It is an arduous up-hill journey. The way to hell is broad and wide and slopes ever so gently, and those who walk that path scarcely notice the descent; sometimes they don't notice the descent because praise of men distracts them and they do not see the warning signs! The choice is still between the golden calf and the Ten Commandments." (Unpublished letter dated Aug. 12, 1975, "Some Thoughts," from Neal A. Maxwell to President Tanner.)

Preach the word

It seems so true that the charge given by Paul to Timothy applies to us equally today:

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

"And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (2 Tim. 4:1-4.)

How fortunate we are to be members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints where we have the gospel in its fulness as recorded in the four standard works of the Church—the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price—and to have a prophet of God through whom the Lord speaks to guide and direct us in these latter days.

As we read in Acts, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12.)

May we have the courage, strength, understanding, desire, and determination to do as Joshua said: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Josh. 24:15.)

This I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Following President Tanner's remarks, President Kimball addressed the meeting as follows: