

## Elder Marvin J. Ashton

### The First Vision

Recently in a study group of college-age students I was asked, "Which scripture or quotation in Church history gives you the greatest spiritual uplift?" Although I don't ever remember having been asked this question in such a setting before, I found myself answering without hesitation and with firm conviction: "I think the most powerful declaration ever uttered in the history of the Church is, 'Joseph, This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!'" (Joseph Smith 2:17.)

We went on to talk about the powers of this celestial conversation and of the plainness of the setting, the greeting, the introduction, and the invitation. Here in a grove of trees were two heavenly personages appearing to a fourteen-year-old boy in response to his earnest pleas and unwavering faith. Here in a setting of simple beauty an obscure boy was called by name by God, was introduced to the Savior Jesus Christ, and was invited to listen to words of understandable plainness that he might begin to learn the most important facts taught in this world.

### The power of plainness

The reality of this vision gives Nephi's declarations concerning plainness new significance. "For my soul delighteth in plainness; for after this manner doth the Lord God work among the children of men." (2 Ne. 31:3.) "I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell." (2 Ne. 33:6.) "My soul delighteth in plainness unto my people, that they may learn." (2 Ne. 25:4.) Through this great prophet Nephi, along with other leaders and wise teachers, we come to realize that we learn more readily if principles are taught and explained in plainness. Brigham Young once said that if he

could do but one thing to bless the Saints, he believed it would be to give them "eyes with which to see things as they are." (*Journal of Discourses*, 3:221.)

Plainness is best comprehended by the humble, the teachable, the intelligent, the wise, and the obedient. Often plain truths are perverted by the pretentious, the crude, the low, the critical, the contentious, the haughty, and the unrighteous. More so than in any other time in our history, there is an urgency in today's society for men and women to step forward and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of plainness. God delights when His truths are taught clearly and understandably with no conspicuous ornamentation. Plainness in life, word, and conduct are eternal virtues. When the plainness of Christian teaching and living is lost, apostasy and suffering result. People walk in darkness when the light of plainness is taken from their lives. "They have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.

"And all this have they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men." (1 Ne. 13:26-27.)

### Gospel truths are plain

The truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ are plain, precious, and powerful. The lives of the worthy are plain, precious, and powerful. May I share with you a few lessons taught in plainness for which I will eternally be grateful. Some of them come from young children who are humble and accepting in their pure faith. The Savior taught that all mankind should become as little children if they would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Now, an

example of the power of plainness in prayer:

Some weeks ago when the First Presidency asked the Church members to observe a week of prayer so that "the ravages of hunger, illness, cold, and drought might be alleviated (now and in the days to come at home and abroad)," it was reported that, at the end of the week in a family home evening, in her prayers an eight-year-old girl pled for more snow so "there would be enough water next summer so the whole family could go swimming together." In the eyes of an eight-year-old, top priority was enough water for a family summer swim. Who is to say her prayer given with plain, childlike faith wasn't most acceptable as she asked for the possibility of family fun together?

### **Plain, unadorned testimony**

The power of a plain, unadorned testimony is always impressive to me. I recall a twelve-year-old boy standing in front of a large congregation to share his testimony. As he stood trembling in fear and emotion, his voice failed him. He stood speechless; our hearts went out to him. The creeping seconds dragged on, making the silence of the moment intense. Prayerfully we hoped that he might gain composure and the ability to express his testimony. After great uneasiness and anxiety peculiar to a young person in such a circumstance, he raised his bowed head and softly said, "Brothers and sisters, my testimony is too small." He cleared his voice and sat down. His message had been given. I thought then, as I think now, what a timely observation. Whose testimony isn't too small? Whose testimony doesn't need to be added upon? After this one-sentence sermon, I acknowledged before the congregation that my testimony was too small also and I was going to give it a chance to grow by more frequent sharing. I had been taught by a plain, simple statement.

Testimonies grow and lessons are taught in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by plain and simple acts. On Sunday morning a young girl just barely out of Junior Sunday School, with her face shining, her hair carefully combed, dressed in her best, hesitatingly walks to the pulpit. Her little hand reaches up and pulls the microphone down to her level, and with a furtive look at her mother for courage, leads the congregation in the sacrament gem. As time goes by, these plain acts become stepping-stones to poise, to testimony, and to a knowledge of the scriptures.

### **Plainness in church service**

Each Sunday at the sacrament tables all over the world, priests dressed neatly, but not in robes or ornamentation, have the honor of blessing the sacrament. Deacons, with pride and reverence, in an orderly but simple routine way, pass the sacred emblems. These Aaronic Priesthood members are taught to watch and plan so no member is deprived of participation in this sacred ordinance. These same young men may be watching and caring for all ward members in all ways as, in the years to come, they serve as bishopric members.

Teenage young women, involved in service projects as simple but as basic as visiting the sick or housebound or fellowshipping a nonmember friend, will find these appropriate stepping-stones in reaching powerful and purposeful womanhood.

Some of life's greatest lessons are taught and learned as we go about our Father's business in routine daily kindnesses.

Hundreds of teachers throughout the Church form car pools to transport distant children from school to Primary so they can be taught the plain and beautiful meaning of "I Am a Child of God." A new convert to the Church is asked to help with a Relief Society

lesson or demonstration. Never before has she stood before a group of women. With support and encouragement from her understanding associates, she is able to fill one plain and simple assignment that could well lead her on her way to family and personal greatness and added opportunities for executive and teaching positions.

### Discipline

The power of plainness in discipline in the gospel of Jesus Christ is not always appreciated and understood, but to the repentant and remorseful, it is a great blessing. Discipline in the Church is plain, and repentance and forgiveness are available by following simple steps. Not long ago a wise member was stopped in the hall of one of our ward buildings and asked in a hushed voice if she had heard that brother so-and-so had been excommunicated from the Church. When the sister indicated that she already knew of the situation, the talebearer said, "Isn't that awful!"

To this her friend responded with, "No, I think it is wonderful. Now the burden can be lifted and he can start back with all of us helping and loving him." Here in simplicity and love was a lesson being taught by someone who could have been a contributor to idle, hurtful conversation.

### Christ taught in plainness

In the life of Jesus Christ, each step along His path was plainly marked and plainly taught that we might learn. Recall with me if you will a few of His words spoken in powerful plainness as shared at random from the book of Matthew.

"Blessed are the meek." (Matt. 5:5.)

"Blessed are the merciful." (Matt. 5:7.)

"Love your enemies." (Matt. 5:44.)

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Matt. 22:39.)

"He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. 10:39.)

"He that hath ears to hear let him hear." (Matt. 11:15.)

"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26.)

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 18:4.)

"Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." (Matt. 20:27.)

Certainly the Savior has spoken in plainness that we may learn. The words of the Savior are eloquent in their plainness.

### Avoid glamour and mystery

Glamour and mystery do not lead to eternal life. Some overlook the great rewards and the joys of the gospel because they feel that the gift of eternal life and the knowledge of the Savior can only be attained by ornamentation and mystery. The Lord has told us that we must learn line upon line and precept upon precept.

May we learn the plain and simple truths of the gospel by following the plain and simple steps outlined by our leaders. Each assignment filled and each lesson learned leads more surely to the celestial kingdom than do pomp, ceremony, and ostentation. Look not for glamour, but for humility in everyday service. Learn obedience and understanding from the plain truths of the gospel and then share them in candid, clear, and frank language and actions.

### God delights in plainness

The power of plainness in living and teaching is a delight to the mind and will of our Heavenly Father. Joseph Smith is a prophet of God. This I say to you in humility and plainness. His fearless words spoken in truth and plainness

will outlive his critics and bring comfort and strength to those who know him for what he is.

To men and women worldwide we declare in sobriety and plainness that God the Father and His Beloved Son Jesus Christ did appear to Joseph Smith: "One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Joseph Smith 2:17.)

We invite mankind everywhere to prayerfully study the truths revealed following this greatest heavenly manifestation. Even though it caused great ridicule and abuse to the Prophet Joseph in the days that followed and ultimately contributed to his martyrdom, I humbly thank God that he had the courage to declare in unmistakable

plainness, "However, it was nevertheless a fact that I had beheld a vision." (Joseph Smith 2:24.) To the truthfulness of these glorious but plain words, I leave you my humble witness in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **President N. Eldon Tanner**

Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Council of the Twelve has just addressed us. We shall now be pleased to hear from Bishop H. Burke Peterson, First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric.

He will be followed by Elder Richard G. Scott, who was sustained yesterday as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

## **Bishop H. Burke Peterson**

Some years ago in our ward fast and testimony meeting a young father proudly gave a name and a blessing to his first child. Afterwards the father stood to bear his testimony. He expressed thanks for this, his first son. He then said in a rather perplexed way that since the little fellow didn't seem to understand anything they said, he wished he knew just how to communicate with him. "All we can do," said he, "is hold him, cuddle him, gently squeeze him, kiss him, and whisper thoughts of love in his ear."

### **Need for love**

After the meeting I went up to the new father and said that in his testimony he had given us a success pattern for raising healthy children. I hoped he would never forget it; even as his children grew to maturity I hoped he would continue the practice.

Among the tragedies we see around us every day are the countless children

and adults who are literally starving because they are not being fed a daily portion of love. We have in our midst thousands who would give anything to hear the words and feel the warmth of this expression. We have all seen the lonely and discouraged who have never been told.

### **Love must be communicated**

A few years ago I had been assigned to tour a mission in another land. Before our first meeting with the missionaries, I asked the mission president if there were any particular problems I needed to attend to. He told me of one missionary who had made his mind up to go home early—he was very unhappy. "Could I help him?" I asked. The president wasn't sure.

As I was shaking hands with the missionaries before the meeting, it wasn't hard to tell which one wanted to