

## Bishop Victor L. Brown

### Fast offerings

As I address this vast body of priesthood brethren tonight, I do so in humility and with a prayer in my heart. The two subjects I will discuss come by assignment. The introduction to my first subject is recorded in the Old Testament as spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?"

"Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

Four wonderful blessings are promised by the Lord to those who obey the law of the fast:

"Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.

"Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.

"And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday:

"And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." (Isa. 58:6-11.)

Regarding this scripture, President Harold B. Lee had this to say:

"The tremendous blessings that come [from fasting] have been spelled out in every dispensation. . . . If you analyze . . . the 58th chapter of the book of Isaiah you will find unrav-

eled why the Lord wants us to pay fast offerings, why he wants us to fast. It's because by qualifying thus we can call and the Lord can answer. We can cry and the Lord will say, 'Here I am.' Do we ever want to be in a condition where we can call and he won't answer? We will cry in our distress and he won't be with us? I think it is time we are thinking about these fundamentals because these are the days that lie ahead, when we are going to need more and more the blessings of the Lord, when the judgments are poured out without mixture upon the whole earth." ("Listen and Obey," Welfare Agricultural Meeting, 3 April 1971, copy of typescript, p. 14; Church Historical Library.)

President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., had this to say: "The fundamental principle of all Church relief work is that it must be carried on by fast offerings and other voluntary donations and contributions. This is the order established by the Lord. Tithing is not primarily designed for that purpose and must not be used except in the last extremity." (As quoted by Marion G. Romney, "Our Primary Purpose," Welfare Agricultural Meeting, 3 April 1971, copy of typescript, p. 8; Church Historical Library.)

### The Lord's financial law

Fast offering is the Lord's financial law given for the blessing of the poor. For many years it was understood that fast offerings should represent the cost of the two meals not eaten. This understanding came into being because, in the early days, members were generally asked to give the actual food saved by fasting. Conditions were so desperate that money would have been of little use. Later, the understanding seemed to

be that \$1 per capita would be adequate.

However, in recent years, President Kimball has said of the fast offering: "I think we should be very generous and give, instead of the amount we saved by our two meals of fasting, perhaps much, much more—ten times more where we are in a position to do it." (In Conference Report, Apr. 1974, p. 184.)

It is important to recognize that the fast offering is a freewill offering, the amount of which each individual is responsible to determine. It is not the same as tithing, which is 10 percent of our interest annually. The amount is left up to each individual, and yet a living prophet has said we should be very generous. Wouldn't it be wonderful if our faithfulness would generate fast offering funds sufficient to operate the entire storehouse system?

Perhaps the following scriptures will give us some guidance as to how generous we should be:

First, from the Doctrine and Covenants, section 42, beginning with verse 30. This is a revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith regarding the law of consecration:

"And behold, thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support that which thou hast to impart unto them, with a covenant and a deed which cannot be broken.

"And inasmuch as ye impart of your substance unto the poor, ye will do it unto me; and they shall be laid before the bishop of my church and his counselors. . . .

"Therefore, the residue shall be kept in my storehouse, to administer to the poor and the needy." (D&C 42:30-31, 34.)

The Lord restates this principle many times, including section 70 of the Doctrine and Covenants, verse 7:

"Nevertheless, inasmuch as they receive more than is needful for their necessities and their wants, it shall

be given into my storehouse."

Further, you will recall when a certain ruler asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life, the Savior responded:

"Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.

"And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up.

"Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

"And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.

"And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

"For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (Luke 18:20-25.)

Again, from the Doctrine and Covenants, we learn:

"For it is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures.

"I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine.

"But it must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low.

"For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves.

"Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have

made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment." (D&C 104:13-14, 16-18.)

### Teach law of fast

May I conclude my remarks on fast offerings with portions of a letter I received several years ago from Elder John H. Groberg, who at that time was president of the Tongan Mission.

"Enclosed find a check for \$1,000 for excess fast offerings from the Tongan Mission. Normally this letter would end here, but because of an experience I recently had I would like to add a little more.

"As you may or may not be aware, Tonga is one of the poorest countries financially in the world. The average wage rate is only around 12¢ per hour if you are lucky enough to have a job. . . .

"Recently, while visiting one of the far distant islands that is very difficult to get to, I went late in the day to the home of one of the good widow sisters there.

"When I first approached her hut the sun was still quite bright and I could not help but notice the stark poverty of her surroundings. It had been raining earlier. The mud and decay and the ever-present smell of drying fish were at first repulsive. But the warmth of meeting with a fellow Church member—especially after years of separation—together with tears of appreciation for the long-awaited visit, soon pushed the unpleasantness of the surroundings temporarily into the background.

"As we conversed in her fluid native tongue and she told of her love for and faith in the Church and of all the blessings she had received, I could not help but think about her apparently miserable circumstances. . . . All sorts of ideas went

through my mind, and I must have let my thoughts wander as I suddenly became aware that somewhere between phrases about blessings and poverty and service she had gone to her hut and was now returning with a small knotted rag.

"Suddenly my mind seemed to fill with light, and the words 'fast offerings' flooded in. I was so excited with the idea that had come so suddenly and so clearly, that you can imagine my utter amazement and unpreparedness when she took a threepence (a coin worth about 3¢) from her rag and said softly, 'Here is my fast offering . . . to help the poor.'

"I wanted to explain that fast offering was to help her, not for her to help others. The explanation never came, for as I looked through misty eyes, first at the threepence then back at the good sister, the whole scene changed.

"The hut was a glowing mansion and the mud was gold. . . . The world seemed to stand still for a moment. All of nature seemed to stop and listen as from the heavens the whole universe seemed filled with the reassuring words: 'Blessed are the poor . . . for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' (Matt. 5:3.)

"As the setting sun signaled the end of the day, so it also told of the approaching end of her beautiful life of service.

"I took the threepence, and as I write this check the whole experience once again fills my mind and I wonder, 'How many threepences to make a thousand dollars?'"

May I encourage all bishops present tonight to remember this wonderful Tongan widow as you teach the law of the fast and as you bless the poor by wisely and judiciously expending these sacred funds.

### Evaluate stake and ward budgets

In the sweet glow of this experience, let me talk now with you about

stake and ward budgets. We are very concerned about the financial stress under which many of our people are laboring. Bishops, particularly, have the responsibility not to let programs become too expensive and thereby become a financial burden to the members.

It is all too easy for leaders to assume that others have discretionary income similar to their own. May I illustrate what I am talking about by quoting portions of a letter from a concerned mother:

"In September, it was making and selling pizzas three nights a week and Saturday mornings to raise money for volleyball uniforms. There were class parties, New Beginnings, leadership workshops, and ward service projects.

"In October and November it was volleyball practice and games three nights a week, a ward dinner, a Halloween party, a stake midweek fireside, and a barn dance.

"In January there have been basketball practices and games to start the sports program going again, a stake standards night, and a fund-raising project.

"In February, along with the basketball games, there have been roadshow rehearsals three days of the week, a skiing party, a snow party, a stake camp meeting, and a workshop to finish up the Sesquicentennial projects to take up at least twenty-two days of this month.

"I'm sure I need not go on and on with this word picture. But still there is more you should know about: Coming up is a 'slave auction,' a car wash, a doughnut sale, a singing telegram project, lawn raking every Saturday morning until summer to raise money for a super activity in Idaho. There's an Aaronic Priesthood outing for both the boys and girls in May, two Scout overnights besides Beehive camp and Scout camp."

We are sufficiently concerned, that Elder Gordon B. Hinckley ad-

ressed this subject last evening in a special joint meeting with Regional Representatives and stake presidents. May I quote just a sentence or two from his remarks: "I should like to say that sacrifice, where needed, is an important aspect of the gospel. It is of the very essence of true worship. But unnecessary sacrifice, that requested because of extravagance or poor management, is evil." You bishops should expect that your stake president will meet with you almost immediately upon returning from conference to evaluate both stake and ward budgets. The stake budget, of course, has an important impact on the ward budget.

There are some very specific areas which you should carefully evaluate.

1. Energy costs: Lights should be turned off when rooms are not in use. Air conditioning and heating should not be used unless absolutely necessary and particularly when the building or portions thereof are not in use.

2. Paid custodial services: Such services should be reviewed with an eye to using ward members on a rotation basis to take care of the grounds and the basic cleaning. Thus professional custodial hours could be reduced and their efforts concentrated on maintaining mechanical and other complex systems. On this particular item, written suggestions will be forthcoming very soon.

3. Welfare projects: Each project, through efficient management, should contribute to the commodity production budget to the maximum degree so as to reduce the need for cash contributions from the individual ward members to meet this commitment.

4. Activities: Current policy is that the yearly budget include all ward and stake activity funding and that there not be any fund raising going on in addition to the budget. Youth conferences or activities that

require expensive and extensive travel should be eliminated.

These are but a few of the ways of reducing the financial burden on the people.

Clearly we are preparing for the day when the higher law, that of consecration, will again become the financial law of the Church through which we will properly take care of the poor. Until that time, it is our responsibility and blessing—as a matter of fact, our covenant—to give generously from our surplus to bless the poor.

We stress the teaching of personal and family preparedness as the first principle of the welfare services program. It is, therefore, incumbent upon each stake president and bishop

to make sure that excessive financial demands are not made upon the people which will weaken their financial security and make it impossible for them to take care of their own needs.

May the Lord bless us to be wise and sound stewards in blessing the people with our teachings and our leadership, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Romney

Bishop Victor L. Brown, Presiding Bishop of the Church, has just addressed us.

Elder David B. Haight, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will be our next speaker.

## Elder David B. Haight

Scott Hall is an unusual young man. His father, Garth, is an assistant coach for the Brigham Young University football team.

Recently Scott asked his mother for a white shirt.

"But you have all of these other beautiful colored shirts. Why do you want a white shirt?" asked his mother.

"I just have to have a white shirt," he said.

"But why?" his mother asked.

Scott replied, "I can't be a missionary without a white shirt."

Scott is two years old.

### Expansion of the Church

The story of the expansion of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints throughout the world not only is a miracle but is "as the stone . . . cut out of the mountain without hands [that] shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth." (See D&C 65:2.)

Recently a California family, driving through St. George, Utah, on vacation, was attracted by the unusual architecture of the St. George Temple. They walked around the building, admiring its beauty.

Having a little time to spare, the parents entered the information center; their two young children crossed the street to sit under the shade of a tree near our meetinghouse.

A teacher, calling the children in to Primary and seeing the two young visitors, said, "Come on in to Primary." They went in.

The parents, now finished at the information center, started looking for the children. After searching for nearly an hour, they saw them come out of the chapel.

The father said, "We've been looking all over for you. Where have you been?"

They replied, "We've been to Primary."

"Primary! What's Primary?"

"Primary is where you learn