

President Hinckley

We have just heard from Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder L. Tom Perry of that same Council will be our concluding speaker.

Elder L. Tom Perry

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God”

President, I'm starting to receive the distinct impression that we've been listening to you. I, too, will take my text from the Book of Mormon, that great and ancient record that offers us special perspective that comes only from studying what is roughly one thousand years of human history. We see the cycles of nations as they turn to and then away from righteousness. We see the unity that comes from a faith in God and a desire to build His kingdom. And we see the dissension that results when the hearts of the people turn to selfish wants and desires, to the pleasures of the flesh, to riches and worldly possessions.

One of the first warnings from the prophets in ancient America is found in the second chapter of the book of Jacob. Jacob denounces his people's love of riches and the pride that has found a place in their hearts. He implores them to turn their hearts again to the Lord. He begins with these words:

“And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they.

“And now, my brethren, do ye suppose that God justifieth you in this thing? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. But he condemneth you, and if ye persist in these things his judgments must speedily come unto you” (Jacob 2:13–14).

Now, we see that often this turning away from the Lord comes with prosperity. Those who are more prosperous can become filled with pride, and they look down on their brothers and sisters who have less, thinking them inferior. Although Jacob does not say it, this process can also work the other way. Those who are less fortunate begin to feel deprived. They become consumed by what they do not have, blaming others for their predicament and blaming the Lord. They, also, turn their hearts away from Him.

The important point is that the Lord condemns both the preoccupation with worldly possessions and the lack of occupation with building His kingdom, whether it is a consequence of having too much or too little.

Invest in eternal things

Jacob further counsels, “Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you” (Jacob 2:17).

Here we see a direct application of the second great commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jacob tells his people not to discriminate against their brothers and sisters who have less than they do, but to share what they have with them.

“But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

“And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted” (Jacob 2:18–19).

So often it is the order of things that is fundamental in the Lord's instructions to us. The Lord is not telling us that we should not be prosperous. This would be inconsistent with the many records we have of Him blessing His people with prosperity. But He is telling us that we should seek prosperity only after we have sought and found Him. Then, because our hearts are right, because we love Him first and foremost, we will choose to invest the riches we obtain in building His kingdom.

As we have been told by our prophets, one of the important reasons the Book of Mormon record was kept, and through miraculous circumstances placed into the hands of Joseph Smith to be translated, was to serve as a warning to the people of this generation. Accordingly, we need to take Jacob's counsel to heart. We should read this scripture as though it were written expressly for us in these days, because it was. His words should cause us to ask soul-searching questions of ourselves. Is the order of things right in our own lives? Are we investing, first and foremost, in the things that are eternal in nature? Do we have an eternal perspective? Or have we fallen into the trap of investing in the things of this world first and then forgetting the Lord?

These, of course, are difficult questions to answer. Sometimes a contrast will offer a perspective that cannot otherwise be gained. Stories of the early Church leaders have always been helpful to me as examples of what it means to place the kingdom of God first. These stories really began to live for me when I was a young missionary. In those days missionaries were not blessed with the many teaching aids that we have today. We had the scriptures and a big, black box that contained a record player and a set of records entitled *The Fulness of Times*. (I always hoped and prayed for a small companion because we would carry this big black box on a broomstick between us. If I was taller, the weight would always shift to my companion!) These records depicted the historical

account of the early history of the Church from the First Vision to the Nauvoo period.

Story of Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball departing on missions

There was one episode depicted on the records that would nearly bring tears to my eyes as my companion and I would listen to it over and over again. It was the account of Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball leaving their wives, children, and humble homes to journey to Great Britain in response to their mission calls to that faraway land. Heber C. Kimball records the event in these words:

"September 14th, . . . President Brigham Young left his home at Montrose to start on the mission to England. He was so sick that he was unable to go to the Mississippi, a distance of thirty rods, without assistance. After he had crossed the river he rode behind Israel Barlow on his horse to my house, where he continued sick until the 18th. He left his wife sick with a babe only three weeks old, and all of his other children were sick and unable to wait upon each other. Not one soul of them was able to go to the well for a pail of water, and they were without a second suit to their backs, for the mob in Missouri had taken nearly all he had. On the 17th, Sister Mary Ann Young got a boy to carry her up in his wagon to my house, that she might nurse and comfort Brother Brigham to the hour of starting.

"September 18th, Charles Hubbard sent his boy with a wagon and span of horses to my house; our trunks were put into the wagon by some brethren; I went to my bed and shook hands with my wife who was then shaking with a chill, having two children lying sick by her side; I embraced her and my children, and bade them farewell. My only well child was little Heber P., and it was with difficulty he could carry a couple of quarts of water at a time to assist in quenching their thirst.

"It was with difficulty we got into the wagon, and started down the hill about ten rods; it appeared to me as though my very inmost parts would melt within me at leaving my family in such a condition, as it were almost in the arms of death. I felt as though I could not endure it. I asked the teamster to stop, and said to Brother Brigham, "This is pretty tough, isn't it; let's rise up and give them a cheer." We arose, and swinging our hats three times over our heads, shouted: "Hurrah, hurrah for Israel." Vilate, hearing the noise, arose from her bed and came to the door. She had a smile on her face. Vilate and Mary Ann Young cried out to us: "Goodbye, God bless you!" We returned the compliment, and then told the driver to go ahead. After this I felt a spirit of joy and gratitude, having had the satisfaction of seeing my wife standing upon her feet, instead of leaving her in bed, knowing well that I should not see them again for two or three years'" (Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967], pp. 265-66).

I have often wondered how these brethren, as valiant as they were, could do what they did. Truly they were willing to make any sacrifice asked of them to build the kingdom of God. They were laying up "treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt" (Matthew 6:20).

Unite in building the kingdom

There is something else about this story, however, that has always intrigued me. As Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball left on their missions to Great Britain, there appeared to be a lot of support from their brethren to help them on their way. Israel Barlow assisted Brigham Young across the Mississippi River. Later, Charles Hubbard sent his son with a wagon to the Kimball home to assist the two missionaries as they began their long journey.

If we look carefully at this story, we catch a glimpse of the unity that

must have existed among the Saints in those early days. As husbands and fathers would leave for missionary service, their departure was made easier because they knew that brothers, sisters, priesthood leaders, and friends would step in to help fill the void created by their absence.

These brethren were able to invest in building the kingdom of God in far-away lands because they knew that others would be investing in building the kingdom at home by helping their loved ones whenever assistance was needed. There was a unique bonding, a special faith in the community of Saints, dedicated to a common goal, a common purpose. If we return to Jacob's counsel to his people, we see the same message communicated as he instructed them to be familiar with all and to share freely of their substance (see Jacob 2:17).

What this testifies to me is that we can tell whether or not we put the kingdom of God first by looking at how we treat our brothers and sisters in the Church. Is there a special bond uniting us? Is there an absence of envy and backbiting? Do we rejoice in the success of a brother or sister as much as in our own? Do we share our substance so that all may be rich like unto us? Ultimately, are we our brothers' and sisters' keepers?

As I travel throughout the Church I marvel at all the positive things that are occurring. Yet I never feel that we, as a people, are living up to our real potential. My sense is that we do not always work together, that we are still too much interested in aspirations for personal honors and success, and show too little interest in the common goal of building the kingdom of God.

Deepen commitment

When we look at all the Lord asks of us, it can sometimes seem overwhelming. Of course, where much has been given, much is expected. I believe it is helpful when faced with an enormous challenge to view it as a step-by-step process. We begin by taking the

first step, then continue by taking one step at a time. I am certain that the Lord is pleased even with our small beginnings, because in His infinite wisdom He knows that small things often become great things.

The first step always involves a deepening of commitment to the Lord and His glorious work. Again, this is a commitment to consider His work first. Our subsequent steps are guided by this initial commitment, but can, of course, take several directions.

Serving our brothers and sisters

We can help by serving our brothers and sisters in the Church. We can go to those who have not yet received the gospel and convert them to its truths. We can go to the temple and perform this great redeeming work for the dead. As we engage in the work of the Lord, He will increase our capacity as we increase our desire. We will pull closer together as a people engaged in a common effort. Through sacrifices we make one for another and for Him, we will realize our potential as His children and prepare the way for His eventual, glorious return.

May each of us accept the challenge to seek the kingdom of God first, before and above all else, and by so doing draw closer together as a people, until we are all of one heart and one mind, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us.

We remind the brethren of the general priesthood session which will convene here in the Tabernacle this evening at 6:00 P.M. It's held at that earlier hour so that those in the East who receive it by satellite will not have to be up so late.

The nationwide CBS Tabernacle Choir Broadcast tomorrow morning will be from 9:30 to 10:00 A.M. Those desiring to attend this broadcast must be in their seats by 9:15 A.M.

We call your attention to the fact that the choir broadcast and the conference sessions tomorrow will be broadcast according to mountain daylight time because of the change to daylight saving time tonight. All of you should be sure to move your clocks ahead one hour before you retire tonight.

We express our very deep appreciation to the Kearns Region mixed choir for the inspirational music we have heard this afternoon.

The choir will now sing in closing, "The Love of God." The congregation is invited to join in singing "I Know That My Redeemer Lives" when directed to do so by Sister Poulsen. Following the singing, the benediction will be offered by Elder Robert E. Wells of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

The choir sang "The Love of God."
Elder Robert E. Wells offered the benediction.

GENERAL PRIESTHOOD SESSION

The general priesthood session, the third session of the 157th Annual General Conference, convened in the Tabernacle at 6:00 P.M. on Saturday, April 4, 1987. President Ezra Taft

Benson presided, and President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted.

The music for this session was provided by the combined priesthood