

wrote it in Nha Trang, Vietnam, in May 1967:

“There was a memorable meeting this morning, which began with a senior military chaplain of another church addressing us warmly as ‘My brothers in Christ.’ This touched me deeply, and the meeting that went along was consistent with his gentle beginning.

“It was a very special, tender meeting; the Spirit was strong.

“It was uncomfortably warm in the room where we met. There were two ancient air conditioners, but they were ineffective. In fact, we discovered when we finally opened the door that it was cooler outside than in. Notwithstanding this, a great spirit was felt and a sweet experience enjoyed.

“Outside the room after the meeting, I walked quietly down the passage alongside the large room where we had met. As I passed the back door, I looked in and saw a kind of human barrier that had been set up to separate the many young men who were lingering in

the front part of the room from a few who were in the back. Three men had their hands on the head of another who sat on a chair. All four were dressed in battle gear; two had returned from air strikes to the north just in time for the meeting, and one was shortly to go. The three members of the district presidency were giving a blessing to an officer senior to them all, setting him apart as a district missionary.”

For some reason this sweet scene affected me more deeply than any priesthood sermon I have heard. Priesthood to them meant the right and the power to serve, to act in the name of the Lord as his agents and in his interests with their fellowmen. This scene I hope I will never forget.

The scriptures teach us, “My sons, be not now negligent: for the Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him” (2 Chronicles 29:11).

That we may, faithfully, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder J Ballard Washburn

President Benson's early life

Brethren, it's an honor to be with you. I humbly pray for the Spirit to guide the things that I say, that we may look at a few brief events in the life of our prophet and resolve to try harder to be like him, to be true disciples of Jesus Christ.

Elder Kimball quoted Mr. F. M. Bareham as saying, “When a wrong wants righting, or a truth wants preaching, or a continent wants discovering [and, we might add, or God wants us to read the Book of Mormon], God sends a baby into the world to do it” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1960, p. 84).

And so it was that on August 4, 1899, in Whitney, Idaho, Sarah Benson started into labor. Her husband, George, gave her a blessing. “Dr. Allan Cutler attended her in the bedroom of their farm home, with both grand-

mothers, Louisa Benson and Margaret Dunkley, there. The delivery was protracted. As the baby, a large boy, was delivered, the doctor couldn't get him to breathe and quickly laid him on the bed and pronounced, ‘There's no hope for the child, but I believe we can save the mother.’ While Dr. Cutler feverishly attended to Sarah, the grandmothers rushed to the kitchen, praying silently as they worked, and returned shortly with two pans of water—one cold, the other warm. Alternately, they dipped the baby first in cold and then in warm water, until finally they heard a cry. The 11¾ pound boy was alive! Later, both grandmothers bore testimony that the Lord had spared the child. George and Sarah named him Ezra Taft Benson” (Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987], pp. 13–14).

When Ezra was age twelve, his father was called on a mission, and being the oldest child, Ezra was left to help care for his mother, who was expecting, and his six brothers and sisters. A small-pox epidemic caused them all to be seriously ill, and the mother became critically ill, but they refused the insistence of the doctor that the father come home. And the Lord blessed them, and they weathered this and many other difficult situations while the father served a mission.

"In the early fall of 1920 Ezra spent a weekend in Logan preparatory to enrolling for winter quarter. He and a cousin were standing on a curb on Main Street when an attractive young woman drove by in a Ford convertible and waved to a friend. A few minutes later she drove by a second time and waved again. 'Who is that?' Ezra asked. 'Flora Amussen,' his cousin replied. There was something about the girl that impressed Ezra, and he responded enthusiastically, 'When I come down here this winter, I'm going to [court] her.' 'Like heck you will,' the cousin answered, adding, 'she's too popular for a farm boy like you.' 'That makes it all the more interesting,' Ezra countered. He received the distinct impression that he would marry her" (*Ezra Taft Benson*, pp. 46-47).

President Benson's mission and marriage

In the summer of 1921, at age twenty-one, Ezra received a letter from President Heber J. Grant calling him on a mission to Great Britain. July 14, 1921, he went through the Logan Temple with his parents, and two days later, he said good-bye to his parents and girlfriend and started on his way to England (see *Ezra Taft Benson*, p. 50). Elder Benson studied and worked hard but didn't feel like he was doing too well and wrote in his journal that he was disgusted with his "frail attempt at speaking." But as he matured spiritually, he was invited to speak at the South

Shields Branch. He was assigned to speak on the Apostasy, but instead he "gave a strong and impressive discourse of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon." He later said, "I spoke with a freedom I had never experienced. Afterwards, I couldn't recall what I had said, but several non-members surrounded me and said, 'Tonight, we received a witness that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and we are ready for baptism.' It was the experience of a lifetime. . . . It was the first experience of that kind I'd had, where I knew that the Lord was with me" (*Ezra Taft Benson*, p. 55).

President Benson married his sweetheart September 10, 1926, in the Salt Lake Temple, after they had both served missions. He has said that Sister Benson had more faith in him than he had in himself. After sixty-four years of marriage, they are an example of love and devotion to us all.

Now, each of you young men can know that the Lord is with you and that he loves each one of you. You can follow this great prophet and serve a mission and be married in the temple. You can live a life of service as he has and be a disciple of Jesus.

God's chosen prophet

When President Kimball died, we were living in Arizona. President Kimball had been in our home. We had knelt with him in family prayer, and he had eaten bread and milk with us. We knew he was a prophet of God.

I wanted a witness of the Spirit that President Benson was God's chosen prophet. I wanted to know more than that he was just a good person and next in line after President Kimball. The Lord was kind to me, and, after fasting and prayer, I received, by the Spirit, the witness that President Benson was indeed God's chosen prophet for this time, with a special calling and a special message for our day.

Today there are thousands who have had a spiritual awakening because

they are studying and following the teachings of the Book of Mormon as the prophet has admonished us to do. There are thousands who feel they have received a special personal message from the prophet as he has spoken to the young men of the Church, the young women of the Church, the children, the elderly, the parents. There are thousands who are better people today because they have stripped themselves of pride, as counseled by this great prophet. Yes, "We thank thee, O God, for a prophet to guide us in these latter days" (*Hymns*, no. 19).

I bear witness that Ezra Taft Benson was born to be a prophet, has lived so he could be a prophet, and has been called of God to be a prophet in our day. He has set a pattern of service and endurance that each of us should seek to follow.

We ever pray for thee

In closing, may I read the words of a song that were sung this afternoon by the young ladies' chorus that express our feelings for our prophet.

We ever pray for thee, our prophet dear,
That God will give to thee comfort and cheer;
As the advancing years furrow thy brow,
Still may the light within shine bright as now.

We ever pray for thee with all our hearts,
That strength be given thee to do thy part,
To guide and counsel us from day to day,
To shed a holy light around our way.
We ever pray for thee with fervent love;
And as the children's prayer is heard above,
Thou shalt be ever blest, and God will give
All that is meet and best while thou shalt live. [*Hymns*, no. 23]

May God bless and sustain his prophet, and may we follow him, is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

We have listened to Elders Marion D. Hanks and J Ballard Washburn of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation will join in singing "High on the Mountain Top," following which we shall hear from Elder Durrel A. Woolsey, also sustained as a member of the Seventy at the April conference.

The choir and congregation sang "High on the Mountain Top."

Elder Durrel A. Woolsey

The patriarchal key

My beloved brethren of the priesthood, the Lord Jesus Christ said, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). Could we add, "lose his own soul, and his family"?

As I left California, bound for Salt Lake City to receive training and be set apart for a mission in Arizona, I experienced for a moment an alarming feel-

ing. I had lost all of my keys. The keys to the cars, home, business, and Church calling had been left behind. I had the depressing feeling that I no longer had any keys; even my pockets seemed empty.

Then came the exhilarating thought that I still had the most important key of all, a key that I will hold eternally, if I remain worthy. That key, of course, is the patriarchal key with my family.