

Abide in the Light of the Gospel

M. RUSSELL BALLARD

It's nice to be with you students once again at Brigham Young University. It is a humbling experience, I'm sure, for all of the Brethren who come here, but I don't suppose any have been more humbled in this assignment than I have as a result of an activity I engaged in yesterday with the Brigham Young University golf team. I had the opportunity, with three of the Brethren, to play golf with your team. I watched as the members of the team hit drive after drive three hundred yards out—always straight down the fairway—while I kept pattering back and forth, in and out of the rough and the sand. Finally, one of the members of the team suggested that the objective was to hit the ball into the little hole in the center of the green, not into the sand that lies by the side. And so I had an experience with humility. That was the longest eighteen holes I have ever played or ever expect to play. And I would suggest to President Holland that anytime anybody on the faculty needs to be brought back to reality, have them play just a few holes with your great golf team.

We are here to talk about a very important subject, one that requires that I have the help of the Lord so that I can speak the words he would have you hear through me. And I supplicate our Heavenly Father for that blessing.

Lately I have been impressed more and more with the importance of the teachings in the scriptures pertaining to our ability to secure light in our lives, and with the difference between walking through life with light, the light of the gospel, and walking through life in darkness.

There is much said in the scriptures about this great and blessed attribute of having the light of the gospel in our lives. It would seem to me that as you struggle with your education here at this great university, you would benefit greatly from doing those things in your daily lives and in your studies that will increase the light of the gospel in your lives. The Savior made this statement in the book of John: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46). Darkness is all about us, my brothers and sisters. As a result of being exposed to the world through assignments to stake conferences and through other

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assignments, I have an overwhelming concern for the darkness that is in the lives of most of our Father's children.

Darkness is referred to in the scriptures as the source of evil, with the primary source of darkness being the devil or Satan. He has the power to lead people into darkness, and his every effort is designed to shut them off, if he can, from the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ, thus destroying souls by virtue of darkness. The Savior said in the book of John, in the twelfth chapter, "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light." (Verses 35–36.) That was an admonition given by the Son of God in his early ministry to those who were closely connected with him.

It is always an awesome thing to me to take your time or the time of any audience because I feel something has to happen in these next few minutes that will cause you to want to be better tomorrow than you've ever been before in your lives. We come together in assemblies like this for a very specific purpose. And the Lord has outlined that purpose in very clear terms in section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants. I am going to spend a few minutes in the Doctrine and Covenants with you this morning in the hope that I might be able to teach the importance of this matter of gaining light in our lives. Beginning with verse 74 of section 88 the Lord gave this instruction through his prophet Joseph:

And I give unto you, who are the first laborers in this last kingdom, a commandment that you assemble yourselves together, and organize yourselves, and prepare yourselves, and sanctify yourselves; yea, purify your hearts, and cleanse your hands and your feet before me, that I may make you clean;

That I may testify unto your Father, and your God, and my God, that you are clean from the blood of this wicked generation, that I may fulfill this promise, this great and last promise, which I have made unto you, when I will.

Also, I give unto you a commandment that ye shall continue in prayer and fasting from this time forth. And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.

Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand. [D&C 88:74–78]

We gather together in assemblies like this to sanctify one another, to cleanse one another, so that the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ somehow might penetrate into the core, the very heart, and the depths of our souls, thereby enabling us to walk every day in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the eleventh verse of the same section, the Lord states:

And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings,

Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensities of space—

The light which is in all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things. [D&C 88:11–13]

I came to an understanding and perhaps a vision of what it means to have the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ as our companion and as our guide as we sojourn here on the earth when I was assigned, prior to my assignment now in the presidency of the First Quorum of

the Seventy, to supervise missionary work and the other Church work in the southeastern part of the United States. In that capacity I had the great opportunity to meet with missionaries in zone conferences. While sitting on the stand in a zone conference at one time in the Columbia, South Carolina, Mission I noticed a missionary and his companion come in, walk across the back of the hall, and down the aisle. Then I watched as the senior companion, with great empathy and love, gently arranged for the seating of his junior companion. As I watched, I turned to President Ronald Knighton and inquired, "Is that elder blind?" Upon learning that he was, I made a confession to President Knighton when I said, "I didn't know that we sent totally blind young men or women on full-time missions."

I had a great spiritual experience as I met that young man after the meeting. I don't know whether he recalls or not, but I embraced him and told him how proud I was of him and how sure I was that the Lord was blessing him. This great young man sits on the stand with me at my invitation. He served a glorious mission surrounded by physical darkness, but filled to overflowing with the spirit of the gospel and the light of the Lord. He touched many, many lives. There was no missionary who served in the South Carolina Mission who brought more people into the Church than did this young man. He served as zone leader and finished his mission as the assistant to the president of the mission, despite his blindness.

I put my arm around him as we walked in this morning and asked him, "Do I have your permission to talk about you for a minute or two?" He embarrassedly gave me that permission. I want to read a statement from a letter I received from one of his companions. I took the time to ask all of this young man's companions what they felt were some of the outstanding things in his life. I quote from one letter:

Elder Crabb always radiates the Spirit of the Lord because of his faithfulness to his testimony of the Lord's Church. Because of this he keeps the commandments, lives the gospel, and loves his fellowmen. I honestly mean it when I say that I have never associated with one who carries the Spirit of the Lord like he does.

Another companion wrote to me:

To show how one who is blind can help those who have their sight to see spiritually, let me recount an experience. We were working in the poorer section of a town without much success. The last family on the street invited us into their home. It was a run-down house with a wooden porch that had a few boards missing from it, hard wooden floors, a pot-bellied stove for warmth, and two bedrooms where a father and mother and five children slept on homemade cots. In general it was a place I had only read about in such novels as Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain. It was a hot, sultry afternoon, and it was time to head back to our apartment for dinner and then go on exchanges with ward members in the evening. I was thinking more about the coming evening's activities than I was about this family. After all, we had been in dozens of such homes with no apparent success. At the conclusion of the discussion with the family, I was surprised that we were invited back for a visit a few nights later. As my companion and I were walking down the street after we finished our meeting, Elder Crabb indicated how strongly he felt about the family. He said, "Elder Schultz, I think we can baptize that family." Those words stuck with me until our next meeting with the family when I made sure that I was more spiritually in tune than I had been at the first meeting. After one short month, the family was living the Word of Wisdom, paying their tithing, and they were then baptized by myself and confirmed by Elder Crabb.

May I read this from a letter that I received from this good young man who is on the stand with me today.

The following year [he has told me of his history and now comes to his experience on this great campus] found me walking with one hand on my cane handle and the other hand in the Lord's, walking from class to class at BYU. I have learned humility. I have learned that which is going to have to be learned by everyone sooner or later, that no blessing comes without sacrifice. I wish everyone in the Church could spend a year or two blind so they could have the doors opened to them that have been opened to me. And if I had this life to live over, I would never trade the chance of having vision with any of the experiences I have found without it.

My brothers and sisters, you who are blessed with all of your faculties, love the Lord. Get to know Him. Make Him your constant friend and companion. Counsel with Him. I pray that you will be close enough to Him in your quest for your degree here that when you take your diploma and walk into life to establish your own family and your own set of circumstances, you will also take with you the most precious part of your education. It is far more precious, I believe, than anything you will earn in any laboratory or classroom. It is the testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, that He is the source of all light, that by His light we can walk fearlessly with head held high, despite all kinds of obstacles, and enjoy great success.

Now, with your permission, and with butterflies in Elder Nolan Crabb's stomach, I would like him to come up and bear his testimony to you. He is one of your fellow students. If you have the opportunity to get to know him, take it. I think you will have a spiritual experience just shaking this wonderful young man's hand and feeling his greatness. Nolan, would you come up and address your fellow students.

Nolan Crabb

The Lord once counseled the Church, "If ye are prepared, ye shall not fear." Perhaps a Nolan Crabb-revised edition of that scripture might read, "If you can't see the congregation, it's easier to talk." To illustrate very briefly (because this is Elder Ballard's time and the Lord's time and not mine) what the light of the gospel can do, may I share with you just one experience. Upon arriving home from my mission, I was called into the office of a great bishop in Ogden, Utah, where hands were laid upon my head and a very special blessing was given me. Three months later I was walking on this campus. I have been blessed by our Father in Heaven to such a degree that I have been able to learn, I would say, 95 or 98 percent of it. The mobility instructor who taught me the campus did not show me where the girls' dorms are (I guess that is fortunate for some of you, particularly for my wife, who sits behind me here today), but I would say 98 percent of the campus is within my grasp thanks to the light of the gospel.

On one occasion when I was in a hurry to get to class, a good brother whom I know well came along and said, "I'll take you with me." As we were running along—wouldn't you know it—he took a short cut I had never been through before, one of the two-percent areas; and then he stopped in the middle and said, "I've got to take off to my class now, but you can make it; it's really easy." I said, "I wish I had as much faith in me as you do," and I proceeded to move. It was like being flown over to Tokyo, dropped out of the plane, and told, "Walk to the temple site." I thought, "Right. How?" But I began to move, and as I did so I began to talk to the Lord. With the full power of my spirit I said, "Now, Father, the nearest person is about three hundred feet away, and this is BYU, where you don't ruin your reputation by hollering, 'Hey, come and help.'" People would think I was some kind of a freak, and I couldn't afford that, so I said,

“You’re the only one who can hear me at this point. Can you please get me out of this jam? I’m not exactly sure where I am.” As I began to move again, I began to hear a voice as clearly as I speak to you that said “turn left here” or “go right” or “stay straight.” I also felt a hand on my shoulder, and so real was that force and feeling that I turned around to see who was back there. I did not see anyone, obviously, but more significantly, I did not hear any footsteps either, nor did anyone speak. Within two minutes, brethren and sisters, I heard the sound of a familiar landmark. (The blind find their way by sound here at BYU. Hollywood counts steps in those movies about the blind, but can you imagine doing that on this campus? “Three thousand two hundred and forty-one, three thousand two hundred and forty-two”—we would go crazy. That would not work at all here; we have to use sounds and landmarks.) At any rate, when I heard that sound I knew where I was, and I was able to turn and enter the building where my class was.

As I did so, there were tears in my eyes because I heard another voice, and I thought, “My goodness, what’s my bishop doing down here?” Well, it wasn’t him. It was his voice, but he wasn’t here on campus that morning; I was merely hearing his voice as it was recalled from memory by the Spirit, repeating what he had said three months earlier in that blessing after my mission: “I bless you that in your time of trial the angels of God will come and encamp round about you. And though they will be unseen, they will serve as your guide lights, as your beacons, and as your friends to guide you in areas throughout this earth wherein you need their help.” That guidance comes physically as well as spiritually.

I know that Christ lives. I thank God for great parents and for a family who gave me that knowledge early. I know that He lives. I testify to you that revelation is real. Jesus is the Christ, and He lives. I know it, for on one sacred occasion I heard the voice of the Spirit

declare it to me. And though I saw no great visions of glory at that time, surely I know as I stand here that He lives. I share that witness with you with all the power of my being, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Elder Ballard

Thank you, Nolan. Your story shows how we can walk through this life, really learning to know our Heavenly Father and really learning to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now where is it that we are trying to walk, young people? Where are we trying to get? When all is said and done, why do we have devotionals, why do we have Brigham Young University, why do we have stakes, why do we have wards, why do we have missions? Why do we have a Church? We have them for only one purpose, when all is said and done, and God has stated what that purpose is: “This is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). We seek to qualify someday to walk into his sacred presence. We seek to have our lives sanctified, purified, and cleansed to the point where we can be found worthy to walk into the presence of our heavenly parents and Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Redeemer.

I don’t believe there is any question that your primary objective is to reach the highest degree of the celestial kingdom. But it seems to me that if we really want that blessing, we ought to familiarize ourselves very carefully with the commandments of the gospel; we ought to understand what the road map is; we ought to know it so well that we, like Nolan, can be led by the Lord’s Spirit so that we will be able to continue toward the celestial kingdom.

May God bless you and me that we might ever be sensitive, that our antennas will always be up, that we will realize when we are walking in the wrong direction, that we will sense when the light of the gospel is being forced out by the darkness of the evil one. Sin, of course,

is the best means the devil has of placing a blanket of darkness over us, and when we are doing anything that is less than perfect, that is unworthy of the celestial kingdom, we do not feel as comfortable and as warm inside as we should. Have you noticed that? I do not suppose there is anyone here who is perfect, who has walked this far through life without making some mistakes. And I do not suppose any of us, especially you younger members, are through making mistakes; indeed, some of us will continue to make mistakes as we sojourn through life. But let us hope that we make little mistakes and not big ones. And if we do make mistakes, let us hope that we have the good judgment and sensitivity to realize that the Lord loves us so much and wants us back in his sacred presence so much that he has provided repentance. He has provided ways for us to correct and adjust our course and to get back on the right path that will lead us into his sacred presence.

Oh, my brothers and sisters, as I understand the celestial kingdom and what it is going to be like, I see that being there would be worth anything. I have had a glimpse of that through my grandfather Melvin J. Ballard, who was a personal friend of the Lord Jesus Christ like unto Nephi of old. He knew Him. He had been embraced by Him. He had fallen at His feet and wept tears of joy in His presence. I have read his testimony of that experience with the Lord many, many, many times, and witness has been borne to my soul that my grandfather was in very deed a close personal friend of the Savior of this world. And my grandfather has testified that if we had any idea what a feeling it is to be with Him we would give all we have or ever hope to have to qualify to walk into His sacred presence.

I would ask our Heavenly Father to bless you through all the burdens of midterms, through all of the pressures that are placed upon you, through all the problems you missionaries are having in learning the

discussions, or through whatever else is troubling you. Do not lose sight of your glorious objective. As far as I can tell, everyone who sits here still has the possibility of qualifying to walk into His sacred presence. But this will only occur when we have developed and built into our being the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the light of the Lord, so strongly that we radiate it and that it will purge from us all darkness.

The scriptures tell us that when we become candidates for the celestial kingdom and are invited to go into that sacred glorious place to live through the eternities, our bodies and our spirits will be quickened and we will be filled with light. The Prophet Joseph Smith provided an insight into what it must be like to become celestial when he wrote, "I saw two Person-ages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son.*" (Joseph Smith 2:17.) Further on in his testimony, he wrote:

While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor.

He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant. His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above the wrist; so, also, were his feet naked, as were his legs, a little above the ankles. . . .

Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him I was afraid; but the fear soon left me. [Joseph Smith 2:30–31, 32]

My dear brothers and sisters and fellow members of the Church, we seek to become worthy of that glorious blessing through sanctification and purification and service and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, walking every day in His light. Now may His peace be in your lives. May peace come into your hearts. May you feel at peace and be comfortable in your relationship with the Savior. May you missionaries carry into the world the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for I testify to you in the name of Jesus Christ that when you realize fully that you are indeed his ambassadors, that you *do* speak for him, you will have experiences when the Holy Ghost and the Spirit of the Lord will speak through you. And by that Spirit, lives will change, and you will put forth the hand of fellowship and lead many of our Father's

children out of darkness and into the glorious light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. May each one of us take every opportunity we can to stretch forth that hand to lead our Father's children safely back into His presence.

I would like to leave my blessing with you. I know that President Kimball would have me leave his blessing. He is far off in Japan, preparing to dedicate a temple so that the full light of the gospel with all of its glorious ordinances, blessings, and endowments might be shed upon our Father's children in that part of the world. We bless you that in your quest for education you will never lose sight of the fact that seeking the educated Spirit filled with light is your most important quest. May this blessing be yours and mine for now and for always, I pray humbly in the sacred and beloved name of Jesus Christ. Amen.