

Eternal Priorities

VICTOR L. BROWN

My dear brothers and sisters, this is a glorious sight in front of me and behind me: so many wonderful young people gathered here tonight for a righteous purpose. I feel we have here young men and women of the same caliber as the sons of Helaman but ten times greater in number. These are not my sentiments alone. I visited with the chief justice of the United States, Associate Justice Powell of the Supreme Court, and other judges who attended the dedication of the Law School this week, and they were enthusiastic about the students they saw on this campus. Many of them said you were different. One of them noticed that you even walk on the sidewalks and not on the lawns. Mr. Chief Justice Burger was so impressed with his impromptu visit with the law students. He said that many intelligent, sharp questions were asked, but that they were respectful questions. He felt an attitude of respect from those in the group. I couldn't have been more proud as I listened to these distinguished guests praise you and your school.

You find yourselves here at a very interesting and important time in the history of Brigham Young University. As the centennial of the University is celebrated, we are reminded more forcefully than at any other time of our heritage and, I hope, our blessings.

This school is different from other schools. It has a different faculty, a different student body, a different administration, a different Board of Trustees. Visitors tell us of these differences and yet I'm not sure they understand fully what makes the difference. There are many reasons. In my opinion one of the most basic reasons is we are "not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation" (see Romans 1:16). Another reason is that we know each of us is a spirit child of a loving Heavenly Father. We also know that, should we be valiant in this life, we can return to that same Heavenly Father.

I hope that no student on this campus is afraid to be different from the world. Of course, it isn't too hard when you have several thousand others who think and act as you do. It's not quite so easy, however, when you leave here and go out into the world. As I look at you, I don't see a mass of some eighteen thousand people; I see eighteen to twenty thousand individuals—each a child of God, endowed with separate and distinct personalities, talents,

Victor L. Brown was a member of the Presiding Bishopric of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 7 September 1975.

and abilities. You come from the same number of different homes and environments—from farms, villages, towns, and cities—from different cultures having different aspirations and desires. Yet with all of these differences, the Lord has told us, “If ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). This, of course, has reference to our being one in keeping his commandments.

The Right Attitude

Have you ever considered how important attitude is? A. B. Wells tells of an experience she had with a young man who had the right kind of attitude. As I relate this experience, will you please adapt it to your personal situation, not just in obtaining an education, but also in your attitude toward the Church and your responsibilities in it?

The great overland bus came to a stop. I looked out of the window to see the fringe of a small town. On the other side of the highway, pastureland stretched in many rolling acres. Suddenly I turned from that peaceful scene to see the reason for our stop. One lone passenger entered. The young man, hesitating a bit, looked shyly around. Noting the vacant place beside me, he asked haltingly, “Do you mind if I sit here?”

“Not at all,” I answered, “I like company when I travel. Do sit down.”

He removed his cap and slid into the seat. After a moment he inquired, “Going far, lady?”

“Only as far as Fort Worth, that is my home,” I replied. “We will be there in a little less than an hour.”

“Think of that,” he said with a seeming air of relief. “I’ve been hoping I’d run into someone from there. Don’t know much about the place; I grew up on a ranch far out beyond where I boarded the bus. I’m on my way to Fort Worth, but I don’t know how to find the school once I am there.”

“What school is that? Maybe I can help you,” I said.

“It’s that real big school; college, I guess you’d call it.” Then he went on gravely, “You see, I’m just out of the army, and I’ll get to start school. Servicemen can go, you know, and Uncle Sam pays for it.”

“You’ll be a student at Texas Christian University?” I asked.

“Oh, I don’t know just where they’ll send me, but I’m all excited over having the chance to go at all. You see I didn’t have much schoolin’ as I grew up. But before I get started anywhere I have to go to the Forth Worth School, an’ take what they call an ‘attitude’ test. After I take it, they will know where to send me.”

“Poor dear,” I mused, “he means aptitude, but I can’t embarrass him by explaining.”

After a short silence he asked enthusiastically, “Ain’t it wonderful what they are doing for us guys—sending us to school?”

“Well,” I suggested, “the government feels that you did a lot for your country; it is the least the country can do for you.”

“Maybe,” he drawled, “but what’s fighting a few battles amount to if a fellow can get educated? I’m getting the big end of the deal, lady. I’ve made up my mind to study real hard. I don’t want Uncle Sam’s money throwed away on me.”

Later we stood in the Fort Worth bus station. In his shirt pocket was the slip of paper that was to give him his “attitude” test. With a strong calloused hand he gripped mine, “Thanks a million, ma’am. I feel like I am already on my way to be gettin’ that schoolin’. Ain’t it wonderful?” As I settled myself and my bags in a taxi, I began to review in my mind the gratitude and enthusiasm displayed by the prospective student. “Why,” I thought, “he has the priceless ingredient for success—a right attitude.” Perhaps he had used the correct word, after all. [Sunshine Magazine, September 1963]

Correct Priorities

Now that we all have the right attitude, I should like to introduce the theme of what I have to say by relating an experience I had in Japan some time ago. Approximately six years ago I was in Osaka, Japan. I received a

telephone call from one of the Japanese officers of the Church requesting an appointment. He indicated he had a personal problem to review with me. I invited him to my hotel room and there listened to one of the most intelligent and articulating young men I had ever met. He was a college graduate. He had majored in a special field of science and was employed by a stable, conservative corporation. It happened that one of his classmates who was at the top of his graduating class in the same field of science had become employed by a relatively new, progressive firm in Tokyo. Several times in recent months this classmate had tried to entice his friend, a member of the Church, to come and work for his company. Little interest was shown until one day a vice-president of the firm made contact and indicated he would like to have this young Mormon come to work for him. He could set his own salary, and it could be three or four times what he was then making. His response was, "I have a position in my Church. If there is the slightest question in the minds of the officers of my Church about my leaving Osaka, which will require my being released from my Church position, it doesn't matter how much money you offer me. I will have no interest in your proposal."

The vice-president answered, "I'm not a Christian. I know nothing about religion, but you are the kind of man I want in my organization."

This was his dilemma: should he move from Osaka to Tokyo, which would require his being released from his Church assignment? Of course, I assured him he could serve the Lord in Tokyo as well as in Osaka. So he moved to Tokyo.

I happened to be in Tokyo last October, and I received another call from this same young man asking for a conference. We visited for quite some time. Now, this fine, intelligent young man had become extremely successful in his field. He had broadened his experience and was now a consultant teaching top

managers in major corporations how to operate their companies. He had become a specialist in human dynamics—in other words, teaching people how to behave as they thought they were behaving or as they knew they should be behaving. His time was in great demand. He was making a very handsome income. He was neglecting his Church work, and he was neglecting his family responsibilities. Now his dilemma was "What should I do?" I told him I wouldn't tell him what to do, but did tell him that there was a scripture that would tell him what to do—if he was truly converted. Then I quoted the scriptures: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). I sensed that this scripture might have caused a few little ripples, because he had tasted the fruits of success in the business world. However, we parted as good friends.

A few weeks after I returned home I received a letter from him. He said that now he had his priorities straightened out. He had resigned from the company. His first priority would be his family; second, his Church; and then employment. That is what I wish to discuss tonight, my brothers and sisters: setting priorities—setting priorities and then reviewing them to see that we are not straying. Of course, in setting priorities we must establish goals or objectives. Then, establishing priorities aids us in achieving our goals. It helps us place first things first.

You have heard many times of the pilot who announces to his passengers that he had some good news and some bad news: The good news was "We are traveling at six hundred miles an hour." The bad news, "We are lost." I suppose he had an objective, and that was to arrive at his destination. But his priorities were confused. He let himself get lost. Many people have the same problem. I am quite sure every person would agree that the ultimate goal for each of us is to return to our

Heavenly Father, and yet sometimes we become confused and lost in the process. Satan has an unusual ability to distract our attention and deflect us from our course. But if our first priority had been to keep our eye on the compass, we would not have lost our way.

The Proper Relationship with the Father and the Son

May I suggest some thoughts for your consideration. To me the permanent, unchanging, first priority in our lives is our relationship with our Heavenly Father and his Son Jesus Christ. If that relationship is one of love, of trust, and of obedience, all else will be well. May I try to picture for you what I mean? Recently an attractive young woman—the age of the majority of you students, one of your peers—came to my office with her parents. She came from a good family, but she had lost her way and now was in serious difficulty. She was unmarried and expecting a child. What should she do? My heart went out to her. I think she loved the Lord. She had forgotten, however, that if you love the Lord you keep in touch with him and you keep his commandments. She had control over her emotions until I asked her if she said her prayers. Then she began to cry. How important it is to communicate daily, and more often if necessary, with our Heavenly Father. He always loves us whether we are good or bad. It takes initiative on our part if he is to bless us.

Another experience occurred last Thursday when all of the General Authorities met in the upper room of the Salt Lake Temple under the direction of the First Presidency. This we do on the first Thursday of each month. This is our fast day. One of the most inspiring experiences for me associated with this meeting is to view three paintings portraying three experiences in the life of the Savior. They hang on the wall over the chairs where the First Presidency sit. One shows the Savior on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Another shows him hanging on the

cross, and the third shows him just after he has risen from the tomb. This latter one is the one which draws my attention most of all. The artist has caught what I visualize would most likely be the feelings one would have were he to find himself in the presence of the risen Lord. The Savior is standing straight and tall, looking down with a smile on his face upon the face of a lovely woman who is reverently kneeling before him. She is looking up into his eyes with a worshipful expression on her countenance. To me, being worthy to be received by him, as the artist has portrayed, could well be the first priority of every Latter-day Saint woman and man.

Eternal Family Relationships

Akin to that priority, of course, would be the goal of temple marriage and becoming a righteous parent in Zion. The establishment of righteous and eternal families is our most important responsibility. The Lord commanded that we multiply and replenish the earth (see Genesis 1:28). He also said, “Children are an heritage of the Lord. . . . Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them” (Psalms 127:3, 5). He had also indicated that he who fails to take care of his own is worse than an infidel (see 1 Timothy 5:8).

Some of you have begun your families. You will never have a more important responsibility in this life. President McKay said, “No success can compensate for failure in the home.” There are some very strident, loud voices in society today teaching lessons that come from Satan himself. They would try to tell you that marriage is not necessary for a man and a woman to live together, that sexual intercourse out of wedlock is a part of normal, acceptable relationships, that should a couple marry there should be no more than two children—and better still, no children at all. The daughter of one of our fine Church families recently announced to her parents that she would not have any children, that she was embarrassed at the size

of their family—four—and that her parents had better not have any more. And yet the Lord has said, “Children are an heritage of the Lord.” I’m not sure that the Lord has predetermined when a couple has its quiver full of them.

There are those who are not blessed with natural children. There are some wonderful women who do not have the opportunity for marriage in this life. I believe they, as all of us, will be judged not only on their actions, but also on the intent of their hearts, as taught by King Benjamin.

While some of you are parents, or about to become so, there are many who have that experience to look forward to in a few years. For you young women in particular, my I pass on some good advice from Rosemary Park, given when she was president of Barnard College. Speaking to young woman entering college, she said:

In the next few years you are undertaking the interior decorating of your living for the rest of your life. You are determining whether it is to be sparse and niggardly or whether it is to be rich and varied and vibrant. Most of you will probably live to be one hundred. If you want to keep from being a stuffy bore for forty years, that is between sixty and one hundred, then you’ve got to learn to be something now. In other words, you can’t rely on preserving either your youthful charm or your feminine allure through one hundred. To be young and feminine at sixteen is no achievement. To be a respected person at sixty is. [Saturday Review, 20 April 1963]

Obedience to the Prophet

Another point of priority that to me is right at the top of the list is best described in a song—“Come, Listen to a Prophet’s Voice.” What a wonderful blessing we have to have a living prophet on the earth today, one who speaks with the Lord and for him. When he speaks to us as the prophet, it is as though the

Lord himself were speaking. It is essential then to have the courage to obey. If we listen to him and fail to obey, of what value is it to listen?

One of the great lessons on obedience is found in the Old Testament:

Now, Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper. . . . [You will recall that the king of Syria sent Naaman to the king of Israel, thinking he could cure him of leprosy, which he could not do. Elisha heard of the king’s distress, and suggested that Naaman come to him, Elisha.]

So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.

And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

Are not Abana and Pharpar rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?

Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. [2 King 5:1, 9–14]

Naaman showed obedience to a prophet’s voice. Even the Savior learned obedience, for we read in the scriptures: “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things

which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:8–9).

Service

There seems to be no end to the priorities, and they all seem so important. Yet many of them can be worked on simultaneously. One of these is service. The Savior himself tells us how important service is. In Saint Luke we read:

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.

And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? [Luke 10:25–29]

Jesus then told of a good Samaritan who found the robbed and wounded man who had fallen among thieves and who had already been passed by a priest and a Levite. You will recall how the good Samaritan took care of his needs. Then Jesus said, “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:36–37). It would be interesting to know what some of these characters said as they arrived home that day. In *The New Testament Speaks* by Obert C. Tanner we read the following:

In his interesting book, Stewardship Parables of Jesus, Dr. Long writes an imaginary sketch of what each character in the parable told his family when he reached home that night. He has the priest say, “I saw a sorry sight on the road down today. It seems

that the robbers got that traveling man today. I always told him not to carry too much money and never to resist the brigands. He must have done both today, because they evidently took both money and life.

“I shall take this matter up with the officers of the church. We need better provisions for relief in such cases. I would have helped myself, but apparently the fellow was already dead, and I would have missed my appointment on the program of the meeting of the priests of Jericho if I had stopped to look after the case myself. I referred to the evils of robbery and needs of relief in my address to the priests. I think the church ought to do more preaching along the line of honesty and business and government, and our relief societies should have more money with which to look after such cases. As my boys grow up, I hope they will become great preachers of righteousness for such a time as this.”

Dr. Long continues with the innkeeper. And late in the evening, when the guests had all retired, in the living quarters of the inn, the innkeeper, or hotel manager, speaks to his family: “Well, this house by the side of the road has witnessed a real drama today. You remember that traveling man who always makes it here around noon? Instead of his putting in for lunch, we had two dour-looking churchmen—a priest and a Levite. They had little to do with each other, ate at separate tables, but both told the same story. It seems the robbers got our good-natured and free-handed man today. The priest was sure they had left him dead, but the Levite offered some hope that life was yet in him. They both insisted that I send up for his body, and, if possible, bring him to life. I sent the porter out to get a couple of mules, and that was what I was preparing to do when you asked me this afternoon where I was going. But before I could get away, I saw the strangest sight these old eyes have ever seen. You remember how the Jews hate the Samaritans? Well, what should I see but a Samaritan with the wounded Jewish traveler on his own mule coming up to the inn? And that is the fellow that you heard groaning over in the other room a while ago. The Samaritan paid his bill and said he

would take care of all expenses. Surely this is the spirit of the Nazarene whose teaching is the talk of the town; and it will bring these people of different races together as nothing else. I am glad we have lived to see this day when a man despised will go out of his way and, at great sacrifice of time and money, do a good turn to the despiser by sharing his goods with him. Surely we have lots to talk to God about in our prayers tonight." [The New Testament Speaks, pp. 343, 345–46]

Service to mankind should be a hallmark of a true Latter-day Saint's life.

Sacrifice

There are so many other principles, but for now, finally, sacrifice. The Lord has promised that he will open the windows of heaven if we will pay our tithes and offerings. Sacrifice is preparing us to live the higher law—the law of consecration. Again the Lord was asked about eternal life:

And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God.

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 18:18–25]

Those who pay their tithing, fast offerings, ward budget, and all that is asked are preparing themselves to live the law of consecration. I am convinced that, as soon as we are prepared, that great law will be given to us. There are those who are ready now, but there are not enough.

In conclusion, let me tell you of one lovely woman who is ready. Some time ago I received a telephone call from a bishop. His clerk had opened a contribution envelope which contained a substantial amount of money. It was a contribution from a widow who had been made a widow for the second time in her young life. She had been injured in the accident that took her husband's life and had not fully recovered. She had a family of young children to raise. The contribution was the tithing on the insurance settlement on the death of her husband. The clerk said to the bishop, "Sister So-and-so needs this money much more than the Church does. Don't you think we should return it?" The bishop asked me the same question: "Bishop, what does Sister So-and-so need more than all the money in the world can buy?" Can you imagine the opening of the windows of heaven to this wonderful young woman who had the faith, the conviction, and the devotion to her Heavenly Father to pay her tithes and offerings?

This experience of being with you tonight is a wonderful, thrilling experience. When I think of all of the energy that rests in your bosoms and think of how important it is that that energy be channeled in proper channels with righteous desires, my heart overflows. Each of us is a child of God, and we must always remember that in all we do, in every act—when we're alone when we're on a date, when we're out with a group. If we'll remember who we are and act accordingly, so that our Father who knows us better than we know ourselves will be pleased, what a glorious life we will live!

I want you young people to know that I know God lives. I know this beyond a shadow of a doubt. I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Only Begotten in the flesh, and that God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph Smith—a boy of fourteen years old, younger than any of you students. I know that for several years following that great vision heavenly messengers trained Joseph Smith for his mission. It didn't just happen miraculously any more than it's going to happen that you're going to gain your education miraculously. We have to train and learn how to discipline ourselves if we're going to achieve the fullest measure of our creation.

I know that Spencer W. Kimball is a living prophet of God. I have the great blessing as a

member of the bishopric to meet with the First Presidency at least twice each week. As I sense and feel and witness the workings of the Spirit of the Lord on that great and wonderful man, I cannot deny that he is the Lord's mouthpiece on the face of the earth today. My prayer for you and for me tonight is that we will follow him, that we'll listen to him, and that we will have the courage to obey him. After all is said and done, when you go about your labors remember the one scripture I suggested to that wonderful Japanese Latter-day Saint: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." I ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.