

The Gift That Matters Most

J. RICHARD CLARKE

Realizing the time of year it is—that you are getting ready for finals and the kind of hours that you keep—and realizing what I’ve been through the last few days, I want you to know that I feel just like one of you. I don’t know which one of you it is that I feel like, but whoever it is probably ought to be home in bed.

“Gold, Circumstance, and Mud”—Christmas Gifts

I would like to begin tonight by reading a story by Rex Knowles. He titles it “Gifts of the Wise Children; or Gold, Circumstance, and Mud.”

It was the week before Christmas, I was baby-sitting with our four older children while my wife took the baby for his check-up. (Baby-sitting to me means reading the paper while the kids mess up the house.)

Only that day I wasn’t reading. I was fuming. On every page of the paper, as I flicked angrily through them, gifts glittered and reindeer pranced, and I was told that there were only six more days in which to rush out and buy what I couldn’t afford and nobody needed. What, I asked myself indignantly, did the glitter and the rush have to do with the birth of Christ?

There was a knock on the door of the study where I had barricaded myself. Then Nancy’s voice, “Daddy, we have a play to put on. Do you want to see it?”

I didn’t. But I had fatherly responsibilities so I followed her into the living room. Right away I knew it was a Christmas play for at the foot of the piano stool was a lighted flashlight wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a shoe box.

Rex (age 6) came in wearing my bathrobe and carrying a mop handle. He sat on the stool, looked at the flashlight. Nancy (10) draped a sheet over her head, stood behind Rex and began, “I’m Mary and this boy is Joseph. Usually in this play Joseph stands up and Mary sits down. But Mary sitting down is taller than Joseph standing up so we thought it looked better this way.”

Enter Trudy (4) at a full run. She never has learned to walk. There were pillowcases over her arms. She spread them wide and said only, “I’m an angel.”

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Then came Anne (8). I knew right away she represented a wise man. In the first place she moved like she was riding a camel (she had on her mother's high heels). And she was bedecked with all the jewelry available. On a pillow she carried three items, undoubtedly gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

She undulated across the room, bowed to the flashlight, to Mary, to Joseph, to the angel, and to me and then announced, "I'm all three wise men. I bring precious gifts: gold, circumstance, and mud."

That was all. The play was over. I didn't laugh. I prayed. How near the truth Anne was! We come at Christmas burdened down with gold—with the showy gift and the tinsely tree. Under the circumstances we can do no other, circumstances of our time and place and custom. And it seems a bit like mud when we think of it.

But I looked at the shining faces of my children, as their audience of one applauded them, and remembered that a Child showed us how these things can be transformed. I remembered that this Child came into a material world and in so doing eternally blessed the material. He accepted the circumstances, imperfect and frustrating, into which He was born, and thereby infused them with the divine. And as for mud—to you and me it may be something to sweep off the rug, but to all children it is something to build with.

Children see so surely through the tinsel and the habit and the earthly, to the love which, in them all, strains for expression. [The Guideposts Christmas Treasury (Carmel, NY: Guideposts Associates, 1972), pp. 197–98]

Now, I realize that story carries a little risk because it is so interestingly told. I suppose we look to the gifts of children, and by children we are taught. Christmas is so often interpreted by children. I have record of a fifth grade at Christmas time in High Point, North Carolina. The teacher asked them to answer this question: "If you could give any gift you wanted to, what would you give and to whom?" Here are some of the students' responses:

John Brandon said, "The gift I would most like to give would be love. It lasts forever and never grows dull. It can be given to anyone that you like."

Fonda Hunter said, "If I could give one gift I would give it to my parents. If I could get them to get along together. And live together forever. Year after year, and month after month. If I could give that gift, I would give anything in this world if they would live together. And make up their minds if they are going to live together."

Amanda Green said, "I would give a small orphan child friendship, fun, and a home where he would be happy. I would tell him never to be sad."

Laurie Kerr said, "I would give jobs and good homes to the poor and stop poverty all over the world."

Larry Shaw said, "I would like to give happiness to the people that have not smiled."

Darlene Byrd said, "If I had one gift, I would give it to my mother. I would give her a washer and dryer. Because I love her and she works too hard."

Sylvia Johnson finally said, "I would give my crippled grandmother the power to walk. She stays alone down in her home in South Carolina. We left our dog down there to keep her company. She seems real happy when we come; but she gets sad when we leave. She stayed two years in our house, but she wanted to go back home because she thinks she is too much trouble; but she's not." [Adapted from "One Gift to Give," *The Guideposts Christmas Treasury* (Carmel, NY: Guideposts Associates, 1972), p. 215]

If you had the power to give one gift, what would the gift be and to whom would you give it? I've been pondering that the last couple of days. Not the gift you would like to receive, but what gift you would like to give that would make you the most happy this Christmas? As I focused on the gift I'd like to give, I believe that

I would go to the statement made by Moroni. I'd like to give this gift to my family more than anyone else, for he said:

Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and . . . love God with all your might, mind, and strength. [Moroni 10:32]

I would wish that same gift to all of you tonight. I would wish that same gift to all people everywhere, because I believe that it transcends every other gift. I believe it is the gift that is needed most. It is certainly the gift that I would like most to give.

I know that Valentine's Day to many of you is the official day of love. But when understood, the day we have set aside to honor the birth of Christ stands preeminent. In celebrating this great day, we commemorate the greatest act of love that has ever been demonstrated. We read:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, . . . that the world through him might be saved. [John 3:16–17]

Importance of Values

The Christmas season is a wonderful season because it precedes the new year. It begins to temper us. We begin to search our hearts deeply in introspection about what kind of a year we have had. What are our essential values? Which are most important to us in our lives? We know that as we come to the first of the year we will be thinking again about new year's resolutions. But I believe it is the preresolution time, as we go through this great religious celebration, that helps us to put things in perspective probably better than any other experience we could have which would be so beneficial in helping us to plan our next year and the many years beyond.

I believe there are probably two great words which suggest a challenge to all of you. Those two words are *change* and *choice*. In an

excellent essay Brother Lowell Bennion suggested that there are two worlds. First is the physical world—the world of reality, everything that exists, the laws of nature all around us. With regard to these, we as individuals are quite powerless because these great laws always existed. We didn't have a whole lot to do with them, and we don't have a whole lot to do with them now. There are also many other forces within this world in which we live—politicians, energy czars, hijackers, and highway drivers. We seem to be at the mercy of all of them. They are also somewhat beyond our control.

Brother Bennion says:

Within this larger context of total reality, I live in a second world [which is even more important]—a world of values. It is a life of my own choosing and building. Within the complexity and multiplicity of reality, I make choices, I choose those things which I prefer, things I desire, things precious to me. I place value on them. They become the things that matter most.

As I decide on these values and live by them I gain a sense of individuality, a feeling of creativity, an assurance of measured self-determination. Life becomes purposeful, hence meaningful. [I can take command and feel secure.] . . . The good life evolves as we learn to live by the things that matter most. . . . We become the values we live by. [Lowell L. Bennion, *The Things That Matter Most* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978), pp. 19–22]

In thinking about this statement of Brother Bennion, I recall with you the event in the Book of Mormon where a great prophet stood chained before a wicked king. In the last little while before he was killed, he bore, without any hesitation, what I believe is one of the most powerful testimonies of the Christ that is recorded in literature. Of course, the wicked king and his court generally rejected the message. But there was one young priest whose

heart was touched. He believed, and his life became transformed.

This young priest, Alma, set in motion one of the greatest dynasties that, I think, has ever been recorded in history. Ten generations of leaders of the Church came because of this one man's decision, this one choice of a young priest. Just imagine! For over five hundred years the Church was led by his descendants; and how blessed we are as we read of their testimonies!

Your Influence

Tonight, I have come to testify in behalf of Jesus Christ. How you accept him and how valiant you are in your testimony of him will have an enormous compounding impact upon the Church. That is, this concentration of young Latter-day Saints will have a compounding effect and great impact on the Church for generations. Let me just illustrate it.

I can't tell you if this story is true, but it's a good story. It is a fable of a young Chinese emperor who became bored and wanted to have someone relieve that boredom with a new kind of game or amusement. So he sent out word that he would give a reward to anyone who could invent a game or amusement that would help him be relieved of his boredom. A young inventor came along, and he brought with him a board with 64 squares and a bunch of little carved images which he called pawns. He sat down with the emperor, and he taught him how to play a game which he called chess. The emperor was so delighted with the game that he said, "This is more than I'd ever hoped for. I'm so appreciative that I'll give you anything in my empire as a reward."

As the story goes, the young inventor said, "I don't want a reward. I'm happy that it served its purpose."

The emperor said, "I insist on it. Anything in my empire is yours."

He said, "Well, if you insist, then this is what I'd like to have you do. I would like you

to put a kernel of wheat in the first square of this board. In the second square put two kernels. In the third square put four kernels; in the next one, sixteen; and continue compounding these kernels of wheat until you get to the sixty-fourth square. That's all I want."

The emperor was insulted. He said, "I've given you your choice of any reward, and this is what you do." He called to his aide and said, "Take this guy out and get him a sack of wheat to pay him off and get him out of here." What they discovered, as they began to pay of the request, was a figure something like this: 9,223,372,036,854,775,808 kernels of wheat. At that time, I am told, it was the equivalent of the world's supply of wheat for five years.

Now, the point that I want to make is this: You, as Latter-day Saint students, are committed to a testimony of Jesus Christ. Suppose this burns so brightly that you marry, and your husband or wife feels the same way you do about it, and you continue to have a wonderful Christian home—a home of faith and love. If this testimony continues through you to four children (assuming that every one of your descendants has four children), by the time you get to the fourth generation, you will have affected the lives of 256 direct descendants. Suppose this continues on for ten generations. Your choice will have affected the lives of one million people.

You can work with that any way you want to, but I'm just trying to make the point that the choices we make in our lives are so powerful that, when compounded, they can affect the lives of many generations yet unborn. What will your children believe? What will your grandchildren believe? How strong will your faith be following after you? To whom will you leave your children to teach and to instruct and to direct? Will you leave them to someone else, or will you be the commanding influence? Will you be with your children long enough so that whatever it is you have chosen and what you deeply believe will be those things which affect

their lives for good, that will move on into the succeeding generations?

Knowledge of Jesus Christ

I come to you as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. I make no special claim to superior knowledge or spiritual gifts. My desire is to express the sincere feelings which I have for the Savior and for our covenant opportunities to serve him. I hope that I may be able to strengthen your testimonies with the few things that I may say in the remainder of this time that you may be able to magnify your life as a Latter-day Saint and Christian.

There are few false accusations which disturb me quite so much as the one that says that the Mormons are not Christians. We're seen by some uninformed critics as being cultists who are unworthy of full fellowship in the traditional family of Christian churches. Are we Christians? Naturally we'd answer with a resounding yes. Jesus Christ is our Lord and our Savior. We declare with Peter that he is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16) and, with John, that grace and truth come by Jesus Christ (see John 1:17). We are his church. We bear his name. And as his church, we are the repository of more information about him and from him than anyone else on the earth.

The writers of the four Gospels deal with only three years out of thirty-three. They tell us of less than forty days out of those three years in the life of the Savior. Of these selected days, they deal only with fragments and shreds of information. Now, through his great American prophet, Joseph Smith, whom he has called as the Prophet of the dispensation of the fullness of times, he has revealed himself. The Lord has opened the earth and vouchsafed to him the record by the descendants of Joseph, who were brought here from the land of Abraham under His direction, that he might stand as His witness. As He directed the establishment of His church in these latter days, He has revealed the

essential doctrines and the instructions for the plan of salvation for true believers everywhere. From the Nephite records we learn the inspired messages carefully selected by holy prophets of ancient America for us, in this generation, for the sole purpose that we might come to a knowledge of Christ.

Consider what this church has contributed to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. First of all, we have the testimony and the personal witness of Joseph Smith, who was the first since the meridian of time to declare with words of soberness, "I saw. I know because I experienced." What a marvelous statement of fact! Then through the inspired records which he left us, both ancient records and also the revelations of the Lord, he has given us some very powerful information.

As you know, the brother of Jared had a face-to-face experience with the premortal Christ. Where anywhere would you go for information that would be so powerful and so moving about the Lord Jesus Christ before he took on a tabernacle of flesh? You know the incident where the brother of Jared was in conversation with the Lord concerning light in the ships which had been prepared. Then he saw the finger of the Lord. This conversation pursued from the third chapter of Ether:

And the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord; and it was as the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood; and the brother of Jared fell down before the Lord, for he was struck with fear. [Ether 3:6]

He was asked why he had fallen, and he said,

I saw the finger of the Lord, and I feared lest he should smite me; for I knew not that the Lord had flesh and blood. [Ether 3:8]

Then the Lord said:

Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood; and never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast.
[Ether 3:9]

You know what follows: The Lord could not withhold his presence from the brother of Jared because of his mighty faith. He told him that he was redeemed from the fall.

Ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you.

Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters.

And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image.

. . . This body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh.
[Ether 3:13–16]

Where would you go to get a description of the spirit of man that equals this testimony of the brother of Jared?

There is so much controversy in the world over the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ. Consider the following in the eleventh chapter of 3 Nephi. After the people were prepared through the testimony of the elements, then the voice from heaven testified of the coming of the Christ. Listen to this tender scene. Jesus said to his disciples:

I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. . . .

Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye

may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come.
[3 Nephi 11:10, 14–15]

We have again in latter-day scripture, in section 76 and also in section 110 of the Doctrine and Covenants, testimonies of certainty that men saw the God of heaven, even the Lord Jesus Christ. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery testified:

And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives! [D&C 76:22]

I relate these things simply to remind us all that we have so much. We have so many blessings of the knowledge of Jesus Christ through the restoration of the gospel. How much understanding would we have of the atonement of Christ without the record of the Book of Mormon? How much would we know about justice and mercy? In summary, I would simply say that in this great volume of the Book of Mormon—522 pages covering a period of some 1,000 years, records which have been accumulated and abridged simply to testify to the world of the reality of Jesus Christ—we have a treasure for the world that they might know that he is who he claimed to be.

Have you ever stopped to think that the Doctrine and Covenants also contains the words of Jesus Christ? We have at least 120 revelations given directly by him, containing

over 200 pages of instruction by the Lord Jesus Christ to modern Israel—you and me—during this great period.

Now we read in the book of John, chapter 18, verse 37, of an intriguing dialogue that went on between the Roman governor Pilate and Jesus. Pilate was trying to figure it out. He didn't know what to think of Jesus. He wanted to know if he was a king. Jesus said (in verse 37):

Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

I want to emphasize directly to all of us here that, as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ today, we have made a covenant that we too will bear witness to the truth and, in so doing, that we will be witnesses of Jesus Christ. We make this covenant at the time of our baptism. As we read in Mosiah 18, the saints at that time covenanted that they were willing to stand as a witness of Jesus, in all places wherever they might be, under all circumstances (see Mosiah 18:9). Then, as recorded in section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants, have you thought about the covenant that we have made as candidates for baptism? I hope that we would be reminded of this and ponder this as we partake of the sacrament as we renew this covenant:

All those who humble themselves before God, and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, and witness before the church that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, and truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins, shall be received by baptism into his church. [D&C 20:37]

That's a pretty weighty obligation that we have agreed to. I hope that, as we partake of the sacrament, as I said before, we will recognize that we affirm that we do witness unto God, the Eternal Father, that we are willing to take upon us his name.

Characteristics of Reliable Witnesses of Jesus Christ

I would ask you and me the question, Are we reliable witnesses? BYU collectively represents one of the greatest witnesses to all the world of the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You are the product of the system, of the doctrines, of the principles. You are the product of the families and the parents who have sacrificed that you might be here. So much hinges upon the reliability of the witnesses for truth and of the Christ. I'd like to suggest some of the characteristics that we might consider. You may have another list or some other ideas. I'd like to share mine.

I realize that we're all in the process of becoming what we want to be. None of us has arrived at the place where we are satisfied. But I would think that, first, a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ is one who loves the Lord and is not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Secondly, he or she is one who has a general love for all the children of our Heavenly Father, with a special feeling for those who need him the most and maybe do not look as if they even care or have any interest whatsoever or are not worthy of the blessings. The rebellious, the unconverted, the disbelieving—they need him more than anyone else. It is important for those who know to share their love with those who need. It is easier to fellowship those who are faithful; but can we ignore the sick in spirit and reserve the medicine only for those who are well?

I believe a witness for Jesus Christ would practice integrity in all aspects of life. I had an interesting experience a few years ago. I came down to general conference from Idaho. I went

to purchase some merchandise at ZCMI and to cash a check. They didn't know me, and so they sent me up to the cashier. She asked for some identification. I reached into my wallet and took out some credit cards. Inadvertently, my temple recommend fell out. The cashier said, "I'll accept that."

I said, "You'll accept what?"

She said, "Your temple recommend. It's current, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said, "it's current."

"That's fine," she said.

Well, I thought about that. You know how you get an idea, and then pretty soon the idea gets you. I thought about it all the way home. I thought, "Wouldn't it be great if we had a Mormon credit card, and a card-carrying Mormon could be depended on to keep his word and pay his bills—a card carrying Mormon, who, as a teacher, would teach until there was understanding (that may be a tall order); a mechanic who would honestly repair automobiles; a tradesman who would be a craftsman; one who would practice integrity in every way?" Wouldn't it be great to be a peculiar people on the basis of our honesty and not our Word of Wisdom or a former marriage practice? I think that is a stimulating challenge. I don't know how you'd like to be known as peculiar, but that's a peculiarity I'd like to see all over the world—that Mormons and integrity are synonymous.

I believe a witness for Christ would have forsaken spiritual Babylon or the wickedness of the world while in the world, striving to escape its corruption. This is a great challenge. We cannot be reliable witnesses with one foot in spiritual Babylon and the other foot inside the kingdom of God. We cannot straddle the fence. We've got to make a decision with our lives. The Lord Jesus Christ had a special attitude about those who couldn't make up their minds, recorded in the book of Revelation (see Revelation 3:15–16). I think we ought to ask ourselves, Are we trying to do both?

In the temple the other day, Elder Hales brought an interesting thought to our mind. He said, "There was once a time when the standards of the Church were here [indicating a fixed point] and the world was here [indicating a point some distance away]. The standards of the world are moving further away, and some of our people are confused because they believe it is necessary to keep the distance between the two points the same. So as the world continues to ripen more in iniquity, we can become confused if we try to maintain the same distance between the two." I believe it is possible to become boiled a degree at a time in the waters of Mammon. I believe we have to be careful that we don't become too open minded. As I think George Bernard Shaw said, "We better be careful we don't get caught in the draught." We need to be sure that, as the world changes, we maintain and uphold our standards.

What do you do for entertainment? The movies today and the shows on television are changing their standards. They are changing their rating system so that it will be a little more appealing. Can you depend upon the rating system today? I heard a couple of young people talking about a particular television show. They said, "Well, it wasn't too bad. It had a couple or three rough spots in it—a little adultery and murder and obscenity and brutality and quarreling and profanity and dishonesty. But other than that, it was a pretty good show." I don't know what kind of boiling system we're going through where somehow evil doesn't look like evil anymore. We can become homogenized in our judgment, in our discrimination, in our values, to the point where we can't discern between good and evil if we're not careful. It can happen gradually, like freezing to death. We can become seriously numb before we even know it.

I heard a couple of girls on the elevator in the Church Office Building the other day. One of them said, "well, I can't go (to whatever

Church meeting it was). That's my night for 'Dallas.'"

I said, "Hey, maybe I didn't hear right." Is that where we are? I believe a witness for Christ can tell the difference between the standards of Babylon and the standards of Zion.

I think that a witness for Christ develops a love for the scriptures and the word of the Lord through the living oracle. I just came back from Australia, where President Dan Ludlow is presiding over a mission in Perth. I was impressed that he is teaching his missionaries to love the scriptures in Perth. I was even more impressed at the way his own children expressed a great love for the scriptures. Undoubtedly they have grown up with scripture study. To them, it wasn't a penalty. It seemed to be a great privilege to take time to discuss the scriptures, which they did beautifully.

I believe a disciple of Christ and a witness for him is one who is developing an ability for communion with the Lord through prayer. Now I didn't say just prayer. I said a *communion*. Some time ago I heard one of the Brethren say, "I believe prayer is the most singular important activity that gauges spirituality." If you think about it, when we are right with the Lord, we want to pray. We feel good about praying. We want to report to the Lord and talk with him. If our heart is not right, that is what we don't want to do. We want to stay away from the Lord. And, of course, that is the time when we need prayer the most.

Brother Marion G. Romney told us one day (and I think I'm quoting accurately) that, when he was one of the presidents of a seventies quorum in the Salt Lake Valley, they were asked to come in to have a meeting occasionally with the seven Presidents of the Seventy, during the time when Elder B.H. Roberts was one of the seven Presidents. He said that when Elder Roberts would pray, it was the most illuminating experience that he's ever had. He said, "He talked to the Lord like no other

individual I've ever heard. I wanted to open my eyes several times to see if He was in the room." It is said that B.H. Roberts, who was perhaps the most prolific writer in the history of the Church, a man of great intellect, once said that he considered it was his highest achievement, after a lifelong period of association with the Lord, that he had learned how to pray. The talent of spirituality exceeds all other talents and is within the grasp of all of us.

Our Individual Responsibility

Now, brothers and sisters, while the invitation to come unto the Lord is extended to all mankind, we have to respond individually. Salvation is an individual experience. As we ascend the mountain of the Lord, we discover that the path is steep and rocky. We're tempted to leave the path and look for shortcuts. Such a course always proves to be a hazardous, time-consuming experience and even fatal. I'd admonish you to follow the proven path. It may be steeper; but in the end, it's certainly easier.

You've read in the Book of Mormon where Lehi and his family, just before they went into the wilderness, were given a very curious compass they called the Liahona. The interesting thing about that compass was that it didn't just tell you the direction you were going, but the direction you should go. It was controlled by the faith in God of Lehi and his family. As they grew closer to the Lord, the compass worked very well.

I think that each of us has that kind of a compass. We are given the gift of the Holy Ghost. The closer we live to the Spirit, the closer will be our adherence to the path of righteousness, and we will eliminate much error in our lives. If we live in such a way that we offend the Spirit, the Spirit withdraws itself, and we are then left to our own devices. To the extent that we honor our covenants, the Lord will sanctify our lives and will guide us unto

all truth, which keeps us on the path that leads to eternal life.

If we yield to the enticing temptations of Satan, then we have to remember that Satan has no power over us that we do not give him. We first must reject the Spirit before Satan has power over us. It is this relationship with the Spirit that is so important for us to remember.

Let us not gamble with our souls. There are some who ask, “What does it matter if we indulge in a few pursuits of the flesh? We can always repent.” As Matthew Arnold once said,

*We do not what we ought;
What we ought not, we do;
And lean upon the thought
That chance will bring us through.*
[*Empedocles on Etna*, act 1, sc. 2, l. 237]

This is dangerous thinking! How much time do we have? The gift of repentance must not be trifled with. God will not be mocked. Do you think our Savior would pay such a heavy price to atone for the sins of those who knowingly disregard and spurn his wonderful gift?

I wish I could explain and describe my feelings for the Savior. I cannot comprehend the depth of his love. I don’t understand how he could love enough to suffer as much as he has. That is beyond my comprehension. All I know is that I am grateful for the gift. I am grateful that we are members of a Church which has the knowledge and the understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ as we do. In the words of the hymn:

*I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me,
Confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me;
I tremble to know that for me he was crucified,
That for me, a sinner, he suffered, he bled and died.*

*Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me,
Enough to die for me!*

Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!

*I marvel that he would descend from his throne
divine*

*To rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine;
That he would extend his great love unto such as I,
Sufficient to own, to redeem, and to justify.*

*I think of his hands pierced and bleeding to pay the
debt!*

*Such mercy, such love, and devotion can I forget?
No, no, I will praise and adore at the mercy seat,
Until at the glorified throne I kneel at his feet.*

*Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me,
Enough to die for me!*

Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!

[Charles H. Gabriel, “I Stand All Amazed,”
Hymns, no. 80]

Brothers and sisters, I hope more than anything else that tonight you have thought about you and the Christ, and that you will take the time to read the account of what he has done for us. I want you to know that, by the power of the Holy Ghost, I know that he lives. I know that he is the Messiah, that he is the Creator of this earth, that he is the Only Begotten of the Father. I know that he appeared to the great American prophet, Joseph Smith. We do not worship Joseph Smith any more than the Jews and we worship Moses for introducing Jehovah to the Israelites. But we love the Prophet because he was a witness for Jesus Christ, and he brought us so much information about Him and a powerful testimony that is a certainty in a day of doubt. We need that. I testify to you that every one of us may know, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and I testify to you from the depths of my heart; and I do so in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.