

We Have Everything

F. MELVIN HAMMOND

My dear brothers and sisters, I consider it a great privilege to be with you today. What a wonderful opportunity it is to be with my friend and colleague President Cecil Samuelson and his dear companion, Sharon. It is such a blessing to have Sister Hammond with us. When we were young, just the touch of her hand caused my heart to beat wildly. And, you know, honestly, it still does. Which leads me to this little story:

An honest seven-year-old admitted calmly to her parents that Billy Brown had kissed her after class.

“How did that happen?” gasped her mother.

“It wasn’t easy,” admitted the young lady, “but three girls helped me catch him.”

Seriously, Bonnie has been my spiritual inspiration since that day long ago when she encouraged me to go on a mission for the Lord. Today I thank her for that and for the many other times that she has prompted me to do my very best for the Savior. I humbly proffer my love to her, before all of you. Would that each of you could find such incredible happiness as we have found together.

After a day at school in late fall many years ago when I was a 15-year-old boy, my mother and I were returning to our ranch home. Mother taught at the school, and she

had waited for me to finish basketball practice. As we drove up the dirt lane that led to the house, to our horror we saw a large plume of smoke curling up from the roof—the house was on fire! We jumped from the car and ran across the yard toward the house. At that same moment my father, who had been working in the field and had seen the smoke, arrived on the scene. He ran to the front door and kicked it open. Flames that had been trapped inside leaped out. There was no way to enter. The fire had already engulfed the house.

As a family we stood silently and watched as the flames devoured the stricken building. First the roof fell straight down into the basement, causing a great burst of bright sparks to fly over the yard. Then the walls, one by one, toppled over into the same hole. In 30 minutes it was over. Only a tiny wisp of smoke rose from the ashes of what had been.

The nearest neighbors came to offer their help. They kindly took us to their home for the night. There were no extra beds, but with plenty of warm blankets and pillows, a place

F. Melvin Hammond is a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This devotional address was given on 10 February 2004.

was made on the floor for us to spend the night.

I lay on the floor unable to sleep. In my mind's eye I saw the flames consuming the house and everything that was inside of it: clothing, beds, furniture, priceless pictures, documents—nothing was saved. It was more than I could bear. The tears slipped from my eyes, and I sobbed aloud out of desperation and despair.

Nearby lay my mother and father. They could not close their eyes. Far into the night they had whispered about the loss and what they could possibly do to recover. My sobs caused Mother to rise from the floor and make her way to me. She knelt beside me, took me into her arms, kissed me, dried my tears, and reassured me that everything would be all right.

"But, Mother, we have lost everything," I cried. "We have nothing."

"There, there, my dear son," she replied as she patted my face. "You do not understand. We still have our family. Not one of us was hurt in the fire. We have our dear friends and, most important, we have the Church and the gospel. Don't you see? We have everything."

That following Saturday night the tiny community had a party at the town hall. Everyone came from miles around. They brought presents of every kind: clothes, food, blankets, furniture, hundreds of dollars. One sweet family offered a small vacant family cabin, rent free, for the rest of the winter. It was an outpouring of love and generosity like nothing that had been seen before. Why, I had more clothes than I had ever had before in my life. And we survived that winter in spite of the tragedy.

The years passed, and I had become a man with a family of my own—a beautiful wife and six wonderful children. We had settled in Rexburg, Idaho, where for many years I taught at Ricks College (now BYU—Idaho). We had built a house on the east bench, above the city.

My parents had moved to a small town nearby—Sugar City, Idaho. They had built a lovely little home and were very comfortable. Then it happened. A dam built on the Teton River burst, and millions of gallons of water poured out of the reservoir, flooding the peaceful communities below. A wall of water 10 feet high rushed through the valley, sweeping away everything before it. Several sawmills were located in the valley, and the water picked up thousands of logs that became battering rams, crashing into buildings and literally causing them to explode with their terrible force. The cattle, horses, sheep, houses, and everything in the path of the raging water were gone. The water pushed a cloud of thick dust in front of it, and many of the animals trying to escape suffocated before the water engulfed them. Nearly every home in Sugar City was destroyed and washed away. Thankfully a warning had been sounded in sufficient time for almost all the people in the valley to get safely to higher ground.

Sister Hammond and I were out of town attending meetings in Boise, Idaho. When word of the flood came, we drove the five hours back to Rexburg. It was midnight when we arrived. All of the highways were closed. We came in over the dry farms on dirt roads. No lights were to be seen in the valley. Everything was in darkness. Only the moon shone brightly, and its reflection could be seen for miles on the now still waters left standing on the valley floor.

As we drove into the driveway of our home, five different families rushed outside to greet us. They had come because their houses were completely gone, vanished in the muddy water. My mother had put a few personal items into a small plastic basket and carried them with her as she and my father fled from their home. For the second time in her life everything of material worth was gone. There was no shelter and no food. All of them were weeping. They were so sad and so afraid.

We spread blankets as beds all over the house. After kneeling together in solemn,

tender, humble prayer, everyone found a spot to lie down for the remainder of the night. There was no sleep that night. From the darkness could be heard the pitiful lowing of the surviving cattle. In the early morning hours I heard the muffled sounds of someone weeping. It was my heartbroken mother. I quickly arose from my bed and made my way through the hall into the room where she lay.

I gathered her little frame into my arms. I kissed her sweet face and whispered my love for her.

“Oh, Mel,” she cried, “what are we to do? Everything that we had is gone. We have nothing!”

“It is all right, Dear. Don’t be afraid.” And then I remembered what she had lovingly taught me so many years before. “Mother,” I whispered, “don’t you remember? Why, we have everything. Our family, our friends, the Church, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have everything!”

And she remembered. We wept together, and tears of sorrow became tears of gratitude.

“Oh, yes,” was her reply, “we still do have everything! Everything that is important.”

And so my message for you today, dear students, is that the things that matter most in our lives are our family, our friends, and the Church and gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. For the few precious minutes remaining I would like to impress upon you the importance of each of these. Will you consider them with me and place them in the context of your own lives?

Families

None of us can overstate the infinite importance of the family. Families did not begin with mortality. Each of you is familiar with the doctrine of celestial parentage. To contemplate the family is to contemplate eternity, for each of us belongs to an eternal family. Like it or not, we are all brothers and sisters, children of “heavenly parents” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102).

Now I challenge you to think of your own family. Perhaps you come from homes that are broken with divorce or homes where there is conflict and strife. Maybe there is a lack of love where wickedness and deceit have left you without hope or joy. If so, then I ask you: What can you do at this point in your life to insure that the future will be one of happiness and joy forever?

Remember that this week is Valentine’s Day, and so if I talk a little about romance and love, you won’t mind! For you men, all of this applies only after a faithful mission is completed.

I hope the desire of each one of you is to find an appropriate companion, go to the holy temple of the Lord to be sealed together for time and eternity, and then become worthy parents of many children. Children have a propensity to bring you great joy and some sorrow, but they will help to fashion you into celestial beings. Then you will become exalted and have a fulness of glory, “which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever” (D&C 132:19).

Conversely, if you fail to comply with the commandment of eternal marriage—the forming of an eternal family—then, putting it rather mildly, you are damned and become as those angels who “remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity; and from henceforth are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever” (D&C 132:17).

With this concept in mind you should be able to understand more clearly the pronouncement of Moroni to Joseph Smith when he quoted, with some significant differences, from the book of Malachi:

Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

. . . And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not

so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming. [JS—H 1:38–39]

To me *wasted* means to have been given everything, only to lose it all through neglect, selfishness, or wickedness. You can have exactly the kind of family you would like. For it to be eternal, you must build it on the laws of God. Then you can know exquisite happiness and finally a fulness of joy. I am glad that Elijah did come and that the promises are being kept by the faithful. Eternal families are being formed by sealing power, and thus the cycle of an eternal round continues forever and ever.

I don't know if this has ever been so impressed upon me as it was several weeks ago when in the temple that graces this lovely valley I sealed a great father and a beautiful mother together for all eternity. Their two handsome sons were brought into the room, one of them preparing for his mission. (He has since been called to serve a Spanish-speaking mission in California). They knelt with their parents, and then, using that same sacred power, I united them together as a family forever. If ever there was a heavenly moment in this mortal sphere, it was then and there.

Remember, neither the man nor the woman can be in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom alone! In fairness, there will be some who desire all of the blessings of eternal marriage but through no fault of their own will not have the opportunity. To them I would say: Do not despair, be faithful, stay true, have hope, be believing, keep the commandments, and, as sure as the Lord liveth, He will give you all—all the blessings that are associated with a fulness of the priesthood and eternal life. This is the promise!

Friends

Someone once said that if in the course of our lives we have but one single friend, we are rich indeed. This surely must be true. I have learned through a great deal of experience that

to have friends we must be a friend. Our circle of friends has such bearing on who we are and what we do. Friends can either lift us and build us or bring us down to degradation and destruction. Your closest friends may be your roommates. How you treat them now will dictate how close you will be to them for the rest of your lives. And to some degree it will be a demonstration of how you will treat your own future family.

Once a dear friend and I sat together in my office. We were still young and looking forward to life. As we visited, the conversation turned to our great desires to keep the commandments of the Lord. We discussed our families and the hope that we could raise them up to be of worth to themselves, to others, and to their God. We determined that if we were really friends we would never do anything or say anything that would drag the other down. We made a commitment to each other that in our association we would always build upward. We would lend strength and, if needed, even direction to make us better men. He is still my dear friend. To this day we maintain our allegiance to each other and our bond of eternal friendship. I wish that every one of you could have such a wonderful friend.

My dearest friend is the Savior. Next to Him is my eternal companion. Our friendship is measured by such qualities as loyalty, kindness, trust, love, and sacrifice. The Savior taught us a great deal about this when He said to His Apostles, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). He was willing to submit Himself even to death because of His love for His friends.

I think that I better understand the meaning of His friendship when I read the scripture where He said to His Apostles, "Ye are they whom my Father hath given me; ye are my friends" (D&C 84:63). Oh, to be known as His friend! Oh, to be trusted by Him! Oh, to feel His love! But we must never forget what He

then added: “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14). The friendship of the Savior is conditional: It is formed by our obedience to the Father, which is a manifestation of our love for Him.

The Gospel and the Church

I will try to tie this all together by a continuation of the story with which I began. I grew up and left Montana and went to Ricks College to play basketball. While there, several people became my dearest friends. One was a young man named Keith, who sat in front of me during my first class. He and another young man, Kent, and I spent a great deal of time together. We were high-spirited and, some might say, even a little rowdy. To say the least, we had great fun in and out of class.

Keith introduced me to his younger sister. Suffice it to say, I fell in love with her. I will be forever grateful to him for that one act that has blessed my life now and forever. In those days full-time missions were not promoted quite as much as they are now. I had decided that I wanted to enlist in the air force and become a pilot. But, succumbing to the influence of my two friends and the imploring of Bonnie, who insisted that she would never marry me without my serving, I accepted a call to the Spanish-American Mission in Texas and New Mexico to labor with the Mexican people. Keith went to the northwest, and Kent went to Argentina.

Upon our return home, each of us married in the temple and began our families. We went to college and obtained as much education as we possibly could. Eventually, while still young, we migrated back to Rexburg, Idaho. Kent became a prosecuting attorney, and Keith and I taught religion at Ricks College. Almost at

the same time the three of us were called to be bishops in the Church. A few years later we were called to be counselors in stake presidencies, and I was subsequently called to preside over a stake. All three of us were called to be mission presidents. Then Keith was called to serve as president of the Portland Temple, and Kent and I were called to be General Authorities.

Our whole lives were centered in the gospel and in the Church. We had totally committed ourselves to the Savior. Perhaps some of you know them. I have spoken of Elder J. Kent Jolley, formerly a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy, and President Keith L. Sellers.

I have told you this in an effort to convince you that it requires the gospel and the Church to bring everything that is important in our lives into one eternal sphere. There is nothing else in this life of eternal worth—just family, friends, and the gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ. As you move forward in your lives, I suggest that your focus ought to be on nothing else. Even in our brief discussion, if you have been attentive, you have seen that really we cannot separate nor divide these three elements—they are all combined into one great concept: our eternal relationship with our Heavenly Father and His Only Begotten Son, the Savior Jesus Christ. I am so grateful to Him, and I express my deepest love to Him.

I pray that you will have families that are bound to you forever, that you will have eternal friends that will help you to become better, and that through the gospel and the Church you will eventually be made perfect in Jesus Christ. Then you will be able to say and to understand that “we have everything.” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.