

# *One Man Can Make a Difference*

F. MELVIN HAMMOND

**M**y dear brothers and sisters, I am happy to be with you today, especially as you are beginning a new summer session of study at Brigham Young University. It is pleasing to me to see so many of my dear friends—President Holland, my family, and my mission family, who have come to lend their love and spiritual strength to me on this occasion.

This is a devotional assembly. It is a moment for each of us to think of heavenly things, of things that will build our spiritual strength and draw us closer to our Heavenly Father. I realize, in part, the responsibility that has been placed upon me. Therefore, I seek for the spirit of the Holy Ghost to be with me. And I pray that you, too, will sense my desire and let your faith and prayers be exercised in my behalf.

The famous Christian reformer, Billy Sunday, is quoted as having said that the secret to his success was that “He started a fire in himself and the people came to watch him burn.” I feel that I have come with a fire in my heart, kindled by the love that I have for the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that as the Spirit burns in me, this same Spirit will ignite a fire in you. “Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and

both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:22).

## **Because of One Man**

Some time ago, while laboring in the Lord’s missionary service, a wonderful missionary came to see me. It was near the end of his mission. He was very depressed. Saddened by his own perception of personal success, he had imposed upon himself a standard from which he had fallen far short. As he spoke, he recounted for me the difficult time he had experienced in the MTC. While he was there, his father had died unexpectedly, and for a brief period of time the elder had considered leaving the mission and returning home. But, encouraged by a loving mother and spurred on by an individual commitment, he continued his training and finally found himself in the beautiful country of Bolivia.

I listened to him as he told me of the initial efforts he had made in his mission to work hard, pray often, follow all the rules, and be

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*F. Melvin Hammond was a professor of political science and religion at Ricks College when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 21 June 1988.*

a model missionary—expecting, of course, to be rewarded with hundreds of baptisms. But, unfortunately, the baptisms had not come. Gradually he began to slacken his pace. He felt that his prayers were not being heard, so why pray? The mission rules seemed somehow to be burdensome. They were restrictive, silly things, written by the mission president only to goad and irritate him and the other missionaries.

In despair, he said, “And now I’m nobody! What I do won’t make any difference!” Then searchingly, he quickly added, “Will it, President Hammond?”

For an instant the same questions passed through my own mind. “Can he make a difference? Can I? Can anyone? Does it matter what one man does?” Then, in my mind’s eye I saw a myriad of people and events. I found myself talking eagerly and enthusiastically.

“Elder, do you remember a man named Copernicus?”

For more than a millennium men’s ideas about the universe had been cemented in the theories of the Greeks, of Ptolemy and Aristotle. That is to say, the earth was the center of the universe. Even the Catholic church in the thirteenth century, influenced by St. Thomas Aquinas, had adopted the Aristotelian view that the earth lies right in the middle of the heavens. The dreaded Inquisition managed to silence any radical views that might have been expressed. Then, in A.D. 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus published a new truth: that the earth rotates daily on its axis and the planets revolve in orbits around the sun. Of this, Martin Luther is reputed to have said, “The fool wants to turn the whole science of astronomy upside down” (“Pioneers in Man’s Search for the Universe,” *National Geographic* 145, no. 5 [May 1974]:627). Copernicus did just that, and in so doing set astronomy free.

One man! And today we are awed into humility by the tremendous scope of the universe. Yes, we measure space by light-years,

the distance light travels in one year at the rate of 186,282 miles a second. We know that galaxies are as common as blades of grass in a meadow—perhaps over a hundred billion of them. There are distant objects known as quasars, placed at ten billion light years away from the earth, that in one second throw out enough energy to supply all the earth’s electrical needs for billions of years. And we know of neutron stars whose matter, if contained in a teaspoon, would weigh over a billion tons. The learning goes on and on because of “one man.”

### **Thousands Followed**

The elder seemed interested. For a moment he had forgotten himself and was listening intently. Therefore, I continued. I know of a man raised in India and educated in England as an attorney. He loved his native land and longed for the time that she would be free from the domination of Great Britain. Most of his life he lived in a mud hut that had no electric lights, no running water, no telephone. He didn’t own an automobile, and he never sought or held a public office. By some he was thought to be the most Christ-like person who had ever lived, and yet he was not even a Christian. To India he was the “Mahatma” or “The Great Soul.” He described himself as a “self-remade man.”

When Britain was struggling for survival against the Axis powers during World War II, and some prominent Indian leaders wanted to revolt and throw off her authority, he said, “We will not steal even our independence.” In his efforts to stop the continual fighting between India and Pakistan he often subjected himself to prolonged fasts. During one of those lengthy ordeals a medical doctor tried to get him to take a small portion of beef broth, to which he commented, “Even for life itself we may not do certain things. There is only one course open to me—to die, but never to break my pledge.” And as they begged him to eat or drink, fearing for his life, for his kidneys had

begun to fail, he simply said, "Life is more than science and God more than chemistry" (see Sterling W. Sill, *The Glory of the Sun* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961], pp. 309–10).

Someone has said, "When Cicero speaks, the people say, 'How eloquent!' When Demosthenes speaks, the people say, 'Come, let us march!'" When this humble Indian went out from his house to walk, multitudes followed him. Thousands were willing to submit to death rather than take up arms against their enemies because he did not believe in violence, but rather in the principles of peace and love.

On 30 July 1948, as he hurried to the village prayer ground, blessing the people as he went, a religious fanatic shot and killed him. The Mahatma was gone. His name was Mohandas K. Gandhi. Only one man! Yet through his efforts, India was granted her freedom. The name *Gandhi* will live on forever—in the annals of time.

#### **"In the Hands of Man"**

"You see, Elder, there are men who have truly made a difference."

Yet we must use prudence in our study, for it is possible that evil men can also have a lasting effect upon their fellow beings. A demented Austrian with a view of total world control used his evil genius to disrupt the whole earth. Plunging the civilized world into war, his powerful armies created havoc throughout all of Europe. His regime left behind a path of death and destruction that had few equals in the history of the world. His racial myth of Aryan supremacy was responsible for the mass murder of over six million Jews and many more millions of members of other races, supposedly "inferior" to the Germans. The names of the death camps of Dachau, Buchenwald, and others will long be remembered as horrible proof of the depth of depravity to which supposedly civilized countries may descend. Such atrocities were instigated by one man, Adolf Hitler, who caused himself to be called simply "Der

Führer." In a pamphlet written of the tragedy of Dachau, the author said, "Man cannot trust himself in the hands of man" (pamphlet distributed at Dachau).

Truly a man may make a difference, but if he is not guided by the Holy Spirit, but rather by the evil one, he may jeopardize all that is sacred in this life and in the life to come.

#### **More Than Any Other Man**

The elder sat quietly. Hardly moving. Not speaking. "Are you beginning to understand?" I asked him pointedly.

"I believe I am," he responded. "But, please, don't stop now, President. Go on!" I thought for a moment and then continued.

"Very well. There are two others I would like to tell you about."

On 23 December 1805, a baby boy was born to Joseph and Lucy Smith. They named him after his father. As he grew and developed in mind and in body, schooled in godly principles by his devoted parents, his inquisitive mind sought for religious truth. In response to his humble pleading, the most glorious manifestation ever given to man appeared before him. He saw the living God and Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son. Acting upon their admonitions, one boy (one man) began the incredible task of preparing a way to preach the restored gospel of salvation to "every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (D&C 133:37).

Progress was slow. The translation of sacred records into the Book of Mormon required considerable time and great effort. There were persecutions, killings—every possible delaying tactic conceivable was employed by Satan to stop the work. Still, "having put his hand to the plough" (Luke 9:62), he did not look back. Many followed him. They were driven from place to place. Finding no rest from their tribulations, they relied only on his leadership and their implicit faith in the Savior of Men.

When he was only thirty-nine years old, a bloodthirsty mob stormed a jail in Carthage, Illinois, where he had been imprisoned unjustly, shooting and killing him and his brother Hyrum. His murderers believed that in this way they would stop the work Joseph had begun. But the work did not stop, for it is the work of God. Today, because of one man and his indomitable character for good, the truth is being proclaimed in much of the known world. Of him, Elder John Taylor has said,

*Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it. [D&C 135:3]*

### **Because He First Loved Us**

“And now I come to the last, yet by far the most significant of all,” I said to the young elder.

He was born a babe in Bethlehem of old and placed in a manger by his beautiful virgin mother, Mary. He was the firstborn son in the spirit world and the only begotten son of Eloheim in the flesh. As he grew, “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). At the age of thirty he began his public ministry. To the ancient prophet Nephi, an angel said,

*Look and behold the condescension of God!*

*And I looked and beheld the Redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken. . . .*

*And I beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory; and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him; and I beheld that they cast him out from among them. . . .*

*. . . And I looked, and I beheld the Lamb of God going forth among the children of men. And I beheld multitudes of people who were sick, and who were afflicted with all manner of diseases, and with devils and unclean spirits. . . . And they were healed*

*by the power of the Lamb of God; and the devils and the unclean spirits were cast out.*

*. . . And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record.*

*And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.*

[1 Nephi 11:26–33]

As a resurrected being he proclaimed to the Nephites, on this continent:

*And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil —*

*And for this cause have I been lifted up.*

[3 Nephi 27:14–15]

All this was precipitated by one thing: his infinite love for all of God’s children. The Apostle John said, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). One man!—the Son of the Eternal God, who submitted himself to all of these things in order that we, you and I, might live again with the hope of eternal life.

### **One Faithful Elder**

Now I spoke softly to the young missionary with all the fervor of my soul. I placed my hand on his and said, “Are you ready to go back out into the field of labor? Can you make a difference in the lives of these special Bolivian children of our Heavenly Father? Are you ready to once again ‘take up your cross, follow [him], and feed [his] sheep?’ (D&C 112:14).

It was apparent that his attitude had changed. With a renewed spirit of dedication, tears slipping down his face, he committed himself once again to the work of the Lord. We

knelt in prayer together. I blessed him that he would be able to find the way.

Although he had been weak, I felt an inner confidence in him. As I sought to find direction from the Spirit for a new assignment for the elder, I surprised even myself by sending him to one of the most difficult and remote areas of Bolivia—a small community near the Argentine border named Bermejo. The work had gone badly there for some time, with only a few baptisms to reinforce the little handful of Saints who were discouraged and finding it hard to keep the faith.

But the Lord and his ways are wonderful to behold. In his weekly reports to me the missionary told of his diligent efforts to contact the people and preach the gospel to them. He indicated that they were slow to listen, but that he was continuing his faithful stewardship in that part of the Lord's vineyard. And then it happened!

Overnight a small river running near the village of Bermejo, fed by heavy rains in the mountains, rose to a height never before known in the history of the land. Homes were swept away; and people were drowned. The only bridge connecting the city to the main road was torn from its footings and washed downstream. Communications were destroyed. There was chaos everywhere. Two young missionaries were caught in the turmoil of death and destruction caused by the flooding waters. And one remembered that "a man can make a difference." He threw himself into the turbulent waters to rescue many who were drowning; he sought for those buried beneath fallen buildings; he gave relief to the injured and succor to the hungry.

And a miracle occurred! He became a hero. He was lauded by the newspapers. His name was spoken over the airwaves. The people mentioned his name with reverence. Those who had previously rejected him and the message he carried now searched him out. Their doors were opened to receive him. They loved

him! They accepted his burning testimony of Jesus Christ and the gospel restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. In the few months that remained of his mission he brought scores of wonderful people into the Church. He saw the men receive the holy priesthood and their wives become more lovely in Relief Society activity. Today a beautiful chapel stands in Bermejo. On the Sabbath day it is full of people who still remember one faithful elder who made a difference.

### **What Difference Will You Make**

And now, just for a moment: What can *you* do to make a difference? Each one of those about whom I have spoken paid a price for his remarkable achievements. It seems there is always a price! May I suggest a few methods that will start you on the road to making a difference.

First, attend all three of your Sabbath-day meetings—without fail! Then you will be instructed in principle and truth. You will be reminded of sacred baptismal covenants as you take the Lord's sacrament.

Second, pay your tithing and your offerings faithfully. Then you will begin to understand the purpose for the law of sacrifice and the law of consecration.

Third, maintain a resolute firmness in keeping the law of chastity. Then you will be a pure vessel where darkness is removed and where light remains.

Fourth, when you are prepared, go to the Lord's house. There you will be taught in the ways of godliness and be prepared to receive a fullness of the priesthood.

Fifth, preach the everlasting gospel in word and deed. Then you will share in the joy of a converted soul—you will understand true joy. And you will win the crown of eternal life.

And what difference will you make? The kingdom of God will be strengthened by your membership. Your character will become as strong as steel. You will be a source of spiritual

wisdom and strength to many. And God will love you!

As I look at you, children of Israel, I see the light of truth glowing in your eyes. I know that your desires are good. I pray that you will remember the lives of such great men as Copernicus and Gandhi, that you will not forget what evils can be wrought by men such as Adolph Hitler. I beseech you to think often of Joseph Smith and how his life has affected

your own. I humbly remind you of the only pure, sinless life ever lived on this earth, that of our Savior, Jesus Christ. I sincerely confess to you my love for him, I witness that he lives and that he loves us. Seek for him! Be like him! He is the Way, the Light, and the Life. And when you find him, you, too, will make a difference. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.