

The Price of Love

H. HAL VISICK

It's wonderful that no one ever recites your faults and failures when making an introduction. If they did, we might be here for some time. The music provided us this morning certainly would repay you all for coming here, whatever I may say. It was a marvelous performance. I compliment Sister Gneiting and Brother Staheli.

It's quite a feeling to stand at the devotional pulpit at BYU. I have sat where you sit, listened to my heroes, and thought about all the heroes who have stood here, Karl G. Maeser, Brigham Young, Spencer W. Kimball, and the other great people who have stood here. It cannot be anything but humbling to try to occupy a position which they have filled so well and so nobly. I do not flatter myself that I'm called by the Lord to stand here, but at least he did not prevent me from coming.

It's good you don't have to be perfect to talk about perfection, nor be Christlike to speak about Christ, or we would have few sermons from this pulpit.

Sacrifice and Love

I wanted to talk today about the relationship between sacrifice and love. At first I thought I'd call this talk "Sacrifice Is the Proof of Love." Then I thought, "Wait a minute. Maybe sacri-

fice produces love, so I ought to call it 'Sacrifice Is the Source of Love.'" I'm still not certain of the precise relationship, but I can tell you this: You can't have love without sacrifice. I don't mean someone's sacrificing for you so that you will love them. I mean you cannot love someone else or the Lord unless you pay the price. We find this truth in many scriptures—I'm not going to give you all of them—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16), "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15), "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). You see how sacrifice and love are tied together here. "Whosoever . . . forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

Let's think about the story of the young ruler, rich, accomplished, who came to the Savior, knelt at his feet, and said, "Master, what shall I do to become perfect?"

H. Hal Visick was assistant to the president and general counsel for Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given on 13 July 1982.

The Master replied, “Keep the commandments. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal.”

The young man said, “These have I kept from my youth up.” Then the scripture says the Savior loved him, and he said, “If thou wouldst be perfect, go and sell all thou hath and come and follow me.” The young man went away sorrowing “for he was very rich” (Luke 18:23; see Luke 18:18–23).

Lincoln’s Letter

President Lincoln was informed by the Secretary of War that a certain Mrs. Bixby had lost five sons in the Civil War. He was moved and troubled by this immense, enormous loss that had come into her life. He wrote several drafts of a letter to her. Some of them are still in existence, and we can see the interlineations and changes. Finally, we have it as it was printed later:

I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom. [Carl Van Doren, editor, *The Literary Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Press of the Readers Club, 1942), p. 272]

Sacrifice. . . He could see what we ought to see when we look at America: That it wasn’t built up only out of resources and timber and coal and people that came here to escape their oppressive governments. It was built on the individual sacrifices of millions of people. When de Tocqueville came here to make his memorable tour and wrote about it, he was able to say, “America is great because she is good.”

One wonders, as one looks around, “How long can this greatness last when so few seem to be willing to pay the price of sacrifice?” when 10 to 20 percent of the young men will not even fill out a registration for the draft, and they justify their refusal on grounds of conscience. I don’t mean to be critical of those who choose not to fight because of the sincere conviction that fighting is morally wrong. I believe the American system can embrace diversities of belief on this subject, as on all others. But we need to ask ourselves, “How can we survive if we do not love . . . if we do not love our country, if we do not love one another, if we do not strive upwardly and pay whatever price it may cost to advance our society, our family, our religion?”

Lark Mine

I finished at BYU in the spring of 1955, at the end of the Winter Quarter (we had quarters then). I was not going into the Air Force for about three months so I looked around for something to do. I saw an ad in the paper that said they wanted people to work in the Lark Mine. I drove out there. The Lark Mine is underneath one of the mountains that surround the Kennecott Copper Mine. I was hired. I went into this mine, got on the little train with a bunch of other people who had hats with little lights on them and big heavy boots, and we went into the mountain for a long time. It must have been two, three, four miles. Then we got out and came to the shaft. The shaft had a little car in it that accommodated nine people if you scrunched up. It was on a cable, and it dropped you down that shaft at what seemed like a terrific rate of speed. We went down 4,000 feet below where we went into the mountain, and the car stopped—fortunately. We climbed out and onto another little train that took us out to what they called “the face,” where the mining was being done. We got our shovels, and we shoveled all the ore that was lying there into cars, and the cars left. We started drilling holes in the face, and, when we got that done, we sat

down and had a little bite to eat. After lunch, we pushed dynamite, several sticks, into each one of the holes we had drilled, and someone who knew what he was doing came around and put fuses in all of the holes so that it would blow the middle out first and then the sides so that it would work properly. Then we lit the fuses, got on the train, and headed back for the tunnel. All the fuses were lit at the same time at all the various faces, and, when we got back to where we were to go up the shaft, we could hear the explosions.

Now, that's not too important, I guess, except what I learned there. I met people there, men with five, six, seven, fourteen children, who were going every day into this black hole. I knew I was going to get out—into the Air Force, to fly a plane in the sun. But they, day after day, five days a week, year after year, suffered danger, unremitting toil, boredom, and for what? For those kids and that wife at home, to keep them out of the black hole.

That is sacrifice. Sacrifice is not paying your tithing or going to church on Sunday or filling a temple assignment, although those things are important. It's being somewhere you're needed, where you've got to serve when you'd rather be elsewhere or do something else. Don't you think those men would just as soon have sat on a mountain top playing a guitar and singing a few happy songs and not worrying about where the next meal was coming from or whether Johnny could get braces on his teeth? How about the wives? What sacrifice were they making? Do you think women choose as the highest of all intellectual accomplishment to take a master's degree in physics and go home and change a dirty diaper, cook a meal, sweep the floor, make the beds? You don't think that's sacrifice? Then you don't know what sacrifice is.

Sacrifice, Love, and Faith

In the thirteenth chapter of Hebrews and also in James, the second chapter, there are

discourses about faith and how our forefathers proved they had faith. Some of the examples are the same in each chapter: Rahab the harlot, Abraham sacrificing Isaac, and Moses giving up all the riches of Egypt to be with his people. The scriptures list all the actions that prove these were sacrifices of faith. By their actions they proved that they loved the Lord, that there was nothing they would withhold from him.

I'd like to look at the sacrifice of Abraham for a minute. It seems easy when we read it on the page, you know. The Lord came and said to Abraham, "You've done all that I've asked you to do, and now I've got just one more thing I want you to do. Take your son Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and offer him as a sacrifice."

Can you imagine what Abraham felt? How long had he waited for Isaac to be born? The Lord promised him when he left his home in Ur, when he left Haran, when he came into the land of Israel, when he did each of the things the Lord asked—the Lord said, "You are going to have a posterity that will be numerous as the sands of the sea, and they will bless all nations, and through your lineage the Savior will come."

After a hundred years of waiting, finally the angel came to Abraham and said, "You're going to have a son." Even Sarah couldn't believe it because she was too old, long past the age of childbearing. After all these miracles and everything was fulfilled, and life was good—Abraham loved this boy with all his heart—the Lord came and said, "I'm going to take the thing you love the most."

Abraham gathered some wood and took his servants and his son (whom I take to have been either a teenager or in his early twenties). They went to the foot of the mount. He told the servants to remain, loaded the wood for the sacrifice on his son's back, and they began to ascend. Eventually, his son asked, "Dad, where's the animal for the sacrifice?"

Abraham couldn't answer. He said, "The Lord will provide the sacrifice."

They continued to ascend. Can you imagine the sacrifice that Isaac was willing to make? His father explained it to him. He didn't konk this hundred-year-old man on the head and say, "You're crazy; I'm going down the hill." He allowed himself to be bound and placed on the altar. He was willing to give the sacrifice of love as well and obey his father though it cost him his life. Finally, as the knife was upraised and started its decent, only then did the Lord say, "It's enough. You haven't withheld from me even your son."

It is hard in words to explain our deepest feelings. I've found sometimes in song and poetry we can get closer to the heart of meaning than we can express with words. I'd like to sing a song for you. This song is from the musical *Lost in the Stars* by Maxwell Anderson and Kurt Weill. It's based on the book, *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton. This song is sung by an old black minister—Stephen Kumalo. He has gone to Johannesburg to try to find his son Absalom, who went to Johannesburg to work in the mines and hasn't returned. Stephen searches over the city for his son. As he is searching, he begins to hear about a crime. A white man has been murdered by some intruders. Irrationally, his anxiety about his son begins to be coupled with the fear that somehow his son is involved with this murder. His heart is full of prayers as he continues his search. Finally, he finds Absalom in prison, accused of the murder. His son says, "Father, I was wrong. I'm going to do no more evil. I'm not going to lie anymore." The father has been told that if his son doesn't join in a lie concocted by his accomplices, if he tells the truth, he will be hanged. And so the father, who has served the Lord all his days, finds himself in Abraham's dilemma. If he persists in the path of righteousness, his son will die. He walks out alone and calls upon the Lord, using the name that he has used since childhood, an African word for God, *Tixo*.

And so this song is called, "Oh Tixo, Tixo, Help Me." I will be accompanied by Carol Crist, who has very kindly volunteered to interrupt her day to help perform this music.

*What have I come to here,
At this crossing of paths?
Must he tell a lie and live—
Or speak truth and die?
And, if this is so,
What can I say to my son?
O Tixo, Tixo, help me!*

*Often when he was young
I have come to him and said,
"Speak truly, evade nothing, what you have done
Let it be on your head."*

*And he heeded me not at all,
Like rain he ran through my hands,
Concealing, as a boy will, taking what was not his,
Evdading commands.*

*For he seemed to hear none of my words;
Turning, shifting, he ran
Through a tangle of nights and days,
Till he was lost to my sight, and ran far into evil—
And evil ways,
And he was stricken—
And struck back,
And he loved, and he was desperate with love and
fear and anger,
And at last he came
To this—
O God of the humble and the broken—
O God of those who have nothing, nothing,
nothing—
To this—
To the death of a man!
To the death of a man!*

*A man he had given to death.
Then my words came back to him,
And he said, "I shall do no more evil, tell no more
untruth;*

I shall keep my father's ways, and remember them."

And can I go to him now

And say, "My son, take care,

*Tell no truth in this court, lest it go ill with you
here;*

Keep to the rules, beware"?

And yet if I say again,

"It shall not profit a man

If he gain the whole world and lose his own soul,"

I shall lose Absalom then.

I shall lose Absalom then.

O Tixo, Tixo, help me!

O Tixo, Tixo, help me!

O Tixo, Tixo, help me!

["The Soliloquy," *Lost in the Stars* (New York:
William Morrow and Company, 1950).

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Theatre*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Chilton)]

Our Modern World

Having talked briefly about the quality of sacrifice, the payment for love, I want to look at something of our modern world, where we're going, to see if we can find our way a little bit. It ought to be obvious that a young man who pretends to love in an effort to seduce cannot really love because, if he truly did, he would sacrifice what he wants for the good of the person beloved.

It follows that when we take an infant as, for example, I first took Jennifer, our oldest, helpless, unable to feed herself, clothe herself, clean herself, and work and spend all of our time for this child, moving her up from infancy, clothing her, working for her, with her, striving through a thousand different individual, family, and Church meetings, it follows that we will love her. It has to be so. And it turns out often that the most difficult child in the family is the most loved because the family has made the greater sacrifice for that child.

Of course, the child has to learn to love, too. And when he doesn't pay the price, doesn't serve, he doesn't learn to love. It seems that

when we make an investment in something, we value it, we care for it. You remember old bromide, "When you've made a bad bargain, hug it all the tighter." We do that.

The first time I knew how my father felt about me was when I took my baby Jennifer in my arms, and I said to myself, "Dad held me like this. Dad felt the feelings I feel." Then I thought, "Why, why didn't I know this? Why didn't I tell him how much it meant to me?"

There was a recent court case called "Infant Doe." It took place in a midwestern state. Infant Doe—you notice how lawyers tend to divorce all passion, all emotion and meaning from things—calling him "Infant Doe." This little child had parents with names. I guess he himself never got a name, though. He was born a mongoloid child, retarded, but no one knows how severely. You do not find out the degree of severity until the child gets older.

Infant Doe also had a correctable physical defect. His esophagus was not connected to his stomach, and he couldn't eat. So the doctor said, "We'll go in, do an operation, and connect the esophagus to the stomach. It's a serious operation, but it can be done."

The parents said, "Wait a minute. This child is retarded. It would be better if he didn't live, so we don't want you to perform this operation." And, of course, the doctor could not operate without their consent.

Some well-meaning people said, "We'll go to court and get an order that forces them to let the child have the operation." They went to court, and, to the disgrace of the American judicial system, the court said, "We cannot order this."

So Infant Doe died. What was his crime to deserve capital punishment? He was retarded. What was it his parents didn't want? "It would have been inconvenient," their lawyer said. "It would have been inconvenient to raise this child. This child wouldn't have the same quality of life others have." What do we know about quality of life? Does a bird have no quality of life because

it doesn't think like a man? No, it is a finished work as the God of heaven intended and its life has all the quality God assigned to it.

What do we know about a retarded child's quality of life unless we can be that child? Many retarded children are happier and more loving than the so-called "normal child."

We cannot know what Infant Doe's quality of life might have been, but we do know the difference between life and death. So his parents never made the sacrifice that would have taught them to love Infant Doe. Thoreau said that every deed goes into the great sea of cause and effect and remains there throughout eternity. Who knows what effect that one death has on the quality of life of all the people in this generation and those to come?

It's like Ray Bradbury's story of the time traveler who goes back to the Paleolithic era, blunders off the path, and steps on a butterfly. When the traveler returns to his own time, everything is changed for the worse because that one insect life was terminated prematurely.

I read an interview with a lady who was suing her doctor because he did not tell her about amniocentesis, and therefore, she was not able to learn in advance that her baby was a mongoloid child and destroy the child through abortion. In the interview she said, "I'm happy that I know Tommy, but I would also have been happy if I hadn't known him." I wonder if that is true. I wonder how long the reverberations of destroying that life might have followed her, had she done it. There comes a time when you must pay the price, the sacrifice of love. How lucky she was to get the chance to pay it.

I was looking at an article in the *Wall Street Journal* about something called "values clarification" that's been taught in our schools for about ten years. I don't mean in Provo schools, but in schools throughout the country. Values clarification says that there really is not any right or wrong or good or bad. Values are what we say they are. And, therefore, we should not

be imposing on children our moral standards and beliefs. They ought to invent their own moral standards and beliefs. They ought to experiment. They are saying that society should not tell you whether premarital sex is wrong or right or whether you ought to use drugs. You make up your mind after you have examined it for yourself. And so some thirteen-, fourteen-, fifteen-year-old child, not having the benefit of the experience of older and, hopefully, wiser heads, is making up a set of values and acting on those values. Whenever their parents say, "What you're doing is wrong," he or she will say, "You can't tell me that. That's your value judgment, not mine." No wonder John Taylor gave us such cautions about the kind of people we would choose to educate our children. Without sacrifice of desires and appetites for a higher good, what will our society consist of? What character or quality can result from self-indulgence and sloth?

A book could be written on the subject of sacrifice and love, probably has been.

I would like to encourage us to see the joy of love and sacrifice, to find in the things that come to hand—the work that must be done—the things that apparently the Lord assigns us whether we want them or not—situations where we can create love.

"Vaunteth Not Itself"

True love is not what the world calls love. The word has been cheapened and destroyed along with many other once-beautiful words. When the world talks of love, it means living together without benefit of marriage or extramarital sex or something equal far from the love born of sacrifice. That's not what the Lord means by love. Maybe that's why the word *charity* was selected by the translators of the King James Version in the book of Corinthians. Remember what it says about love—charity, the perfect love of Christ—the love Christ has for us: "Charity suffereth long and is kind. . . . Charity vaunteth not itself" (in other words, doesn't

advertise itself). Charity “is not puffed up” (1 Corinthians 13:4). (Charity isn’t pride because pride is a love of self, not of others!) All these qualities of love come through paying the price, through service, through sacrifice.

When Oliver Wendell Holmes was invited to address the fiftieth reunion of his Harvard class of 1861, he thought back to the days when he was in the Twentieth Massachusetts Volunteers, a child soldier serving in the Civil War. He told his class what he learned from that service.

*I learned in the regiment and in the class the conclusion, at least, of what I think the best service we can do for our country and for ourselves: To see so far as one may and to feel the great forces that are behind every detail . . . to hammer out as compact and solid a piece of work as one can, to try to make it first rate, and to leave it unadvertised. [Irving Dilliard, Introduction to *The Spirit of Liberty* by Learned Hand (New York: Knopf, 1960), p. v]*

If we would just pay those prices, we would learn to love BYU and we would make something of ourselves. Every time I see one of the athletes, particularly professional athletes, who does something really sensational then leads the cheering as he goes around the stands, jumping and leaping, I think about Oliver Wendell Holmes and his doing a compact job of work and leaving it unadvertised. Sacrifice of pride will inevitably create character. “Charity vaunteth not itself.”

I don’t want to leave the impression, however, that I think life ought to be a dismal surrender of every good thing to the Lord. The Lord doesn’t need our things. He doesn’t need even our service. In fact, he told the Jews on

one occasion, when they were boasting about being children of Abraham, that he could make children of Abraham out of the rocks on the ground. He doesn’t need what we give. We need to give.

When President Joseph F. Smith wrote to one of his boys on a mission, he pointed out the joy of sacrifice.

“You speak, my precious boy”—I wish I could talk to my boys like that. My boys would really think I had flipped my lid if I called them “precious,” “darling,” or something like that, but he writes to them that way—

*You speak, my precious boy, of the “sacrifice” I am making in providing for my boys and for my family. Do you know what “sacrifice” means? Let me tell you. If after all I am doing or can do for the welfare and happiness of my loved ones, they should turn their backs upon me, should deny the Faith, go to the bad, or bring disgrace or sorrow upon themselves or me or my family, then indeed would my labor of love become a sacrifice. But if my children will continue to love me, be true to themselves and therefore to me and to our God, O! then there is no sacrifice tho’ it cost all my worldly things and my life to boot. It will be all gain, all profit. [Hyrum M. Smith III and Scott G. Kennedy, editors, *From Prophet to Son: Advice from Joseph F. Smith to His Missionary Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), p. 98]*

I pray the Lord of heaven will give us the opportunity to profit in that way and through our sacrifices learn to love as he does. May we, through our sacrifices learn happiness, joy, and love, I ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.