

# Remarks at Chase's Missionary Farewell

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There is an apparent rule, honored in some wards as often in the breach as in its observance, that talks given at missionary farewells are not to be devoted to eulogizing the departing missionary. I enjoy the sentimental personal sharing that attends eulogies and do not mind meetings that deal in personalities, but I will follow the rule and devote my remarks to gospel subjects. This is difficult to do because I am very proud of my son and have deep feelings of gratitude and joy relating to the mission experience that awaits him and his readiness for it. I hope he will sense this as I share some advice concerning missionary service.

The first matter I wish to discuss concerns the scriptures, and the Bible in particular. I would suggest to missionaries that the books of the Bible be read and studied as whole books and that the epistles of Paul and other apostles should be read and understood as whole letters. Missionaries often memorize a number of isolated passages without a knowledge of the epistle or the book from which the passages are drawn. This constrictive interest in and narrow use of the Bible is sometimes referred to as the proof-text approach to the scriptures. The Bible is viewed as a text of proofs on various theological topics. This approach serves the limited objective of convincing others of the correctness of some point of doctrine and may, if not corrected, cripple a person's spiritual understanding for life. Occasionally the person whom the missionary is seeking to teach, will have his or her own proof-text collection of scriptures, and the Bible will be demeaned as passage is pitted against passage until the score becomes five to four in someone's favor.

The Bible has truly been the world's greatest book, and it cannot be understood by the proof-text approach. Nor can one come to love it and find ever continuing refreshment in it by such abuse. The truth is that the Bible has

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incorporated within it a number of views of God, a number of views of sin, retribution, punishment, redemption, love, and justice. The dogmatic theologian who must somehow try to harmonize all contradictions and elicit a unitary point of view sets out to teach the Bible rather than to let the Bible teach him or her and has undertaken an impossible task.

I would like my son to know that interpretation of the Bible is not a simple matter. If the search for meaning is approached only in terms of relevance for today, or meaning is sought only in light of the nature of today's human relationships, the search will be deflected down a hopelessly wrong road. With respect to ancient writings, as distinguished from modern scriptures, relevance is only a second-cousin to meaning.

Of course, present-day relevance is a matter of ultimate importance, but it should be deferred until one has sought the original meaning in its historical and cultural context. One should never simply ask of a passage, "What is its meaning?" The first and proper question is, "Meaning for whom?" The original meaning is the meaning the ancient writer sought to communicate with urgency and anxiety in his day and in the light of the nature of human relationships in his day. Ancient Bedouin chieftains, moved upon by God, should not be thought of in terms of Utah County stake presidents projected back in time; nor should an Old Testament comparison of the relationship of a husband (God) to a wife (Israel), be thought of in terms of today's Latter-day Saint marriages. Wives, anciently, were obtained by purchase or conquest, sometimes while still children, and often occupied a semi-servile status. The prophet Hosea bought a wife for fifteen pieces of silver.

It is after we have sought after and tentatively determined the original meaning that we should move on to the more important question of relevance and ask, "What is the meaning of the original meaning for me?"

I would recommend that missionaries embark upon their first serious encounters with the Bible by reading each epistle or book as a whole, by seeking to know the problem to which the epistle was addressed, and the historical context in which it was written. Memorize and know and use the biblical passages that have confirming value for the truths that have been restored, but underwrite their use with a grasp of the context from which they are taken. More important still, do so with a knowledge that it is from the restoration, the actual appearance of God and His Son, and the visitation of other heavenly messengers, and from the confirming witness of the Holy Ghost to the missionary's humble account borne of these events that our message and its convincing power have their source. We cite biblical passages, following witness borne of the heavens' new opening, for the confirming delight they convey by the discovery that truth restored harmonizes with instances of revelation and inspiration from the past. But latter-day revelation and the Holy Ghost are the real source of proof of our message concerning the nature of God, and of the organization, government, and ordinances of his church, not some passage of the Bible selected over others.

The third idea that I would like to touch upon is the distinction between theology and religion. Theology is identified with institutional creeds and doc-

trinal beliefs and is not the same as religion, which is identified with personal faith, behavior, and the religious life. Theology refers to descriptive thought-statements concerning the spatial, temporal, and moral nature of deity, and the relationship between the members of the Godhead and their relationship to humankind; it extends to descriptive statements about the past, about pre-mortal life, about the future and the nature of the resurrection, about ends and goals and purposes of human existence, and about commandments, revelations, and visitations of personages that occurred on specific dates, times, and places.

Religion is identified with kindness, gentleness, thoughtfulness, unselfishness, and love unfeigned; with control of one's temper, discipline of one's appetites, with not listening to gossip, with generosity, compassion, holiness, and charity. The criteria for determining whether one theology is more correct than another are different than the criteria for determining whether one religion or religious life is better than another.

Many missionaries, I suppose, view themselves as being on their missions primarily to share restored doctrinal and theological truths. Theology and doctrine are very important. They provide structure and system. They inform and enlighten personal belief; and personal belief moves on to matters of faith and hope, and from faith to behavior, and from behavior to comfort, consolation, and understanding. My belief that I will see and be reunited with my father, mother, and sister, all of whom have passed away within the last two years, is deeply comforting to me.

But practicing religion is more difficult than understanding theology. Einstein, when asked why progress in human relations and governmental relations had not kept pace with advances in physics, said, "Because politics is harder than physics." I may understand more about theology and doctrine than my wife, Corene, but she is far sweeter and kinder, more unselfish, accommodating and thoughtful than I. And by the same token, the fact that missionaries may be ahead, so to speak, of many people in matters of restored doctrinal truth and in priesthood authority does not mean being ahead of them in matters of religious behavior. Missionaries in their relationships with their companions often act in unkind, thoughtless, impatient, or jealous ways. Chase, you will find some investigators — and some who may not care to become investigators — who may lack correct theological views, but whose lives are filled with overwhelming kindness, unselfishness, compassion, goodwill, and love. When you do, appreciate what you can learn from them and stand in some awe of the wondrous and different ways in which men and women of different beliefs bear a resemblance to God — in some instances a more striking resemblance than our own.

A fourth recommendation is that as a missionary, Chase, you should prepare yourself to share your message with other people on their ground, as well as upon your own ground. Do not require your relationship with others and the accompanying sharing to be centered in a one-directional willingness on their part to take an interest in your religious, cultural, and institutional garden. Paul said, "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a

Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law . . . To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some more." You will be more effective in giving to others that which you have if you will know and appreciate what they have.

But this makes knowing and appreciating the grounding of other people's lives a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. Granting the merit of the reason Paul gives for meeting others on their ground, there has to be a higher reason. In Romans 1:14, he states: "I am a debtor both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise." The J. B. Phillips version of that passage reads, "I feel myself under a sort of universal obligation, I owe something to all men, from cultured Greek to ignorant savage." By not always requiring others to take or to leave what you have to give, you become willing to learn as well as to teach, willing to receive as well as to give, willing to appreciate as well as be appreciated; and you will share with others a wider knowledge of and indebtedness to God.

A further suggestion to you, Chase, and to any missionary, is that you not give up your identity. Your call from the Lord came addressed to Chase Parker, not to "Dear Brother." A mission is an influential period in a young person's life. He or she not only leaves home for the first time, but also gives up his or her first name for the title of "brother" or "sister" and dons the equivalent of a polyester, Swedish-knit uniform. Less visible than this new suit are certain attitudes concerning positions, offices, and honor, and also certain attitudes and perceptions concerning oneself and the world that are sometimes associated with a stereotyped role.

I do not deny the value of roles to which, with freedom neither lost nor surrendered, we partially conform our lives. But Christ came to set us free and to invite us to the use of some nonconventional freedom. A person can serve the Savior best if he or she serves as a person rather than a role player. We have sometimes heard it said that "the office makes the man"; and in saying this, we usually have in mind some great office or role — which is what a mission is. We sometimes see a man, perceived by some to be of mediocre talent and of obvious personal limitations, appointed to an important office such as Supreme Court Justice. Whereas without the office he would have continued in his mediocrity, he now surpasses everyone's expectations. This obviously says a lot for office, but I hope it states only one-half of a two-directional truth. Persons should be spurred upward by worthy offices, but offices and roles should also be informed and shaped by the person. Roles, as well as persons, need and ought to be susceptible to change and to growth, and this will occur only if each informs the other. Paul, Christianity's greatest missionary, was more a person than he was the inheritor of a role when he went about serving his Friend and Master. Offer to the Holy Ghost a *person* in the service of the Lord.

My advice to keep your individuality, Chase, can and should be followed within the mission rules. Keep the mission rules, and encourage others to do so. If you do not, you will be confiscated by them and clearly you cannot then

exercise the freedom I just mentioned. There is a higher use to which freedom can be put than breaking rules. Rules vary from mission president to mission president within the same mission, and from mission to mission. The work and its attendant joy, and assistance from on high, are more important than impatience with the rules. Furthermore, your mission president needs your love and support. No matter what you may think of a given mission rule, your mission president is a man willing to dedicate his time, often at great personal sacrifice, to a heavy but glorious responsibility. He is doing his best. A mission staffed with 200 kids straight out of high school or their first year of college, in varying states of self-discipline and immaturity, needs rules. Let your life be occupied with the spiritual refreshment that comes from seeking and serving the Savior. Every mission president prays for at least a handful of missionaries who will be spiritual catalysts for the rest, missionaries who will lift and set the tone for the mission.

The Talmud states, "A man must love his wife at least as much as himself, but should honor her more than himself." I would like this to apply to companionship relationships. Treat your companion as though your relationship will not end in four months and will instead last forty years. Some of mine have. Do not be captive to the world's method of dealing with problems, failings, and shortcomings in others. Be supportive of those with whom you work. Take pride in their abilities, in their achievements, and in their recognition, and find the joy that comes from loving them. Do not be embarrassed by times of spiritual and emotional sharing.

In closing, let me state to you, Chase, my faith, hope, and conviction that Jesus is our Savior, that His God and Father is the Father of us all, and that we are brothers and sisters to all men and women of all times and places. Many small, close-knit religious bodies, crippled by the fact the world did not understand or appreciate them, have anticipated with a vindictory spirit the prophesied events involving God's dealings with the earth. They looked forward to the world's being set in its place and to their own special role's being vindicated at last. Such views have clouded the vision of some covenant people who first looked forward to a Messiah's coming, as they surely cloud the view of many who now look forward to a second coming.

After the fact, Paul sought both in theology and in missionary effort to extend the primary purpose and reason for the Messiah's first coming to include those who had been excluded from the limited scope held in mind by His covenanted people. Let us, you and I, before the fact of his second coming, overcome the emotional and psychological difficulties that stand in the way of our universalizing the one Messiah and the one Father. Let us give respectful reverence to the efforts of others to worship them and take delight in a belief and hope that God responds to their sincere strivings and answers their real petitions though addressed to him in names and methods strange to us.

A glorious restoration has occurred. Not to share it through missionary work would be a denial of it, a denial of the love for others for which we strive and the love of God which was the restoration's initiating cause.