

# Are You on the Path to Eternal Life?

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**W**hat a treat it is for me to be here today. It's a thrill for me to see young people like you and to hear this beautiful choir, and to know that you're in one of the great institutions of the Church. And I know that you are here for an important purpose, that is, to prepare yourself for the rest of your life. So today I want to talk a about the rest of your life.

I'd like to remind you of why you're here in the first place. Every person here who has taken upon him or her that covenant of baptism was foreordained to greatness in that world which existed before. I've often thought how marvelous it would be to be able to open the book that exists in heaven and see what I've already signed up for. Wouldn't you like to know that? I think you would be surprised.

There is already a plan prepared for you to enter into a kingdom which is beyond your greatest imagination. The kingdom is prepared, and your name is on the door. All you have to do is endure on the path of faith to get there. There's a pathway, and that pathway is taught by God. And His purpose is to teach us how to get to that kingdom which He has already prepared for us. The pathway is simple, but it becomes more complicated when we lose sight of the purpose or end point of the pathway.

Today I thought I'd begin at the very beginning, with Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve, of course, were placed in the Garden of Eden and there was a plan for them. God gave them a commandment, and you all know that commandment, which was "Don't partake of the fruit of that tree of knowledge of good and evil." (See Genesis 2:16) They broke that commandment. And when they broke it, they knew that they were not doing what God had commanded, so they hid themselves in the garden. You all know what happened next. God came to the garden and said, "Adam, where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9) Or, if you want to read the portion that's in the book of Moses, He says, "Adam, where goest thou?" (Moses 4:15)

I have a question for you. Do you really believe that God who knows all things, didn't know where Adam was? I think He knew. So what is the meaning of the question? "Adam, where art thou?" Do you think God is asking for a geographical description of where he could be found, or the bush behind which he was hiding? I don't think so.

I like to think about that question in another way. "Adam, where are you with respect to Me? Where are you are with respect to your desire and willingness to keep my commandments?" Or, if you want to use that version found in the book of Moses, "Adam, where are you headed as related to righteousness?"

I think that question could be asked of each of us: “Where are you going?” “Which way are you headed?”

Another interesting event occurred not long after the Garden of Eden story when Adam and Eve had children. I’m going to mention Cain and Abel for a moment. We know about Abel. He was given to raising flocks. And Cain was given to growing things from the ground—he tills the ground and he harvests. Adam was taught the pathway to eternal life and he taught the same to his children. What was one of the lessons taught? There is an ordinance to remind them that they were to be redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ. That ordinance was called The Law of Sacrifice. It was commanded that Adam take the firstlings of his flocks and sacrifice them to the Lord.

Now, put yourself in Adam’s position. He was placed into the lone and dreary world, and he didn’t have much of anything. So everything that he had would have been very, very precious to him. Now, those of you who know something about animal husbandry know that when you raise flocks of sheep, for example, you keep the very best of your flock for breeding. And the breed stock will then generate superior quality flocks. But God had given Adam a commandment. The commandment was to take the very best—the first and very best of his flock—and to sacrifice it unto the Lord. (See Moses 5:5) The commandment was to take the firstborn, unblemished lamb and kill it. It may not be very good for animal husbandry, but it was very good for what the Lord intended, which was to symbolize to Adam and all of his posterity the great atoning sacrifice that was to be made by the Lord Jesus Christ. Adam taught this law to his children. He taught it to Abel and he taught it to Cain. And we know that Abel and Cain had authority to perform this sacrifice, because the scriptures tell us that both Cain and Abel were authorized, even commanded, to make sacrifices. The law of sacrifice was an ordinance which, for them, was an essential part of the journey to eternal life.

So, what was the problem? Just as we know that there are essential elements to the journey which leads to eternal life, Satan also knows it. And he is determined to see that every one of us, you and me and everyone who ever has or who ever will live upon this earth, doesn’t finish that journey to eternal life. We read about one of the things that he did to divert Cain from his journey to eternal life.

He came to Cain, and he gave him a suggestion. He said to Cain, “Offer a sacrifice to the Lord.” Did you get that part? He didn’t say, “Offer a sacrifice to me [Satan].” He said, “Offer a sacrifice to the Lord.” And he whispers to Cain that which will divert him from his journey. “Do you really want to go to your brother and buy a sheep from him? What is there about your brother that makes him better than you? What is there about what he produces that is better than what you produce? Aren’t you as important as Abel? Aren’t the things which you grow just as important in the eyes of the Lord as the flocks that Abel raises?” (See Moses 5)

Satan invites Cain to offer sacrifices to the Lord, but to do it in the wrong way. And as Cain listens to Satan he decides to offer a sacrifice to the Lord but to do it his own way. He took his produce, his crops and offered them as a sacrifice. And it was not accepted by the Lord. And Satan knew it, and he was pleased.

Why was Satan pleased? Because he knows that the surest way to divert Cain from the journey to eternal life is to persuade Cain to do it his own way rather than the Lord’s way—to pay attention to his own selfish desires; not what really matters to the Lord. He didn’t pay attention to why the Lord commanded a blood sacrifice. Cain’s sacrifice could

not symbolize the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son. It did not bring to memory the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. But Cain wanted to do it his own way, and the cost was great. And Satan was pleased.

Of course, Satan works on others, even the faithful. You all remember what happened when Jared and his family were present at the time of the confusing of the tongues at the Tower of Babel. Jared was very nervous that his family was going to have their language confused so that they couldn't speak to each other. So he went to his brother, who had a special relationship with the Lord—we know he was a great prophet—and he said, “Go to the Lord and plead with the Lord that he not confuse our tongues.”

And the brother of Jared went to the Lord and he pled with the Lord, and the Lord said, “I will not confuse the language of Jared or his family.” And the brother of Jared reported it. Now Jared, thinking he was successful with the Lord, decided he'd go for a little more. He asked his brother to ask God to not confuse the tongues of his extended family and his friends, so that they could communicate with each other. (See Ether 1:34-37)

The brother of Jared went to ask the Lord. And the Lord had compassion on the family and friends of Jared, but as a condition of the requested blessing, Jared and his family and friends were to begin a journey that would take them away from that pool of wickedness into the wilderness to a land, choice above all other lands, chosen by God where they could accomplish those things which would lead to eternal life. It was a journey not only away from evil influences of the world, but a journey to eternal life where they could learn the gospel of Jesus Christ, partake of the ordinances of salvation, and endure in faith to the end. That's the journey the Lord commanded for Jared and his family.

So, Jared and all of his family and the brother of Jared and all of their friends gathered up their belongings and went into the wilderness. We don't know how long it was, but it was likely quite long. And what do we know about that journey? We know that they likely did not have adequate food, and they suffered much fatigue and privation. There were undoubtedly many challenges in this journey which they took into the wilderness. And one thing we know about it is they didn't have a map.

What would you think about it if somebody came to you and said, “We're going to go for a journey, the endpoint of which we don't know and the duration of which we don't know? We know we're never coming back, and we don't have a map.”

They went. And after many days, they found themselves on the shore of a great sea. And finding themselves on the shore of a great sea, they pitched their tents on the shore, and presumable they found there fresh water, land that could be cultivated, fruits and vegetables that were available and game for food. It must have been a wonderful place for them, where they found great peace and repose from a difficult journey. And they stayed there, and they stayed there, and they stayed there, and they stayed there.

Now the brother of Jared was a great prophet and a man who did many wonderful things, which you can read about in the book of Ether. He was camped on that beach with the family and friends of Jared. And the Lord spoke to him from a cloud. The Lord spoke to him for the space of three hours. When I first read that, I thought, “It would be great to have the Lord speak to you for three hours” -- except for the part that follows: “And he chastened him.” Well now, that would be a long three hours! And why did he

chasten him? He chastened him because, the scripture says, that he failed “to call upon the name of the Lord.” (Ether 2:14)

Now I would ask you this question. Do you believe that the brother of Jared, one of the great prophets of all time, didn't pray? It doesn't say this in the book of Ether, by the way, but it's my own personal view that he prayed. And I could imagine the praying going like this: “I'm grateful that we've got this wonderful place to stay. I'm grateful that all my friends and family are around me. I'm grateful that my kids are growing up healthy. I'm grateful that we've got food here and fresh water. I'm grateful for this wonderful beach we're camped on. I'm grateful for all of these things. It's much better than walking through the wilderness without a map.”

But the Lord was not pleased. What was the problem? The problem was the journey the Brother of Jared was focusing on was the journey in the wilderness. But the journey he had promised God he would focus on was the journey to eternal life. And that purpose he forgot, for four long years.

What do you suppose the Lord said to him? We don't know. But I could imagine Him saying something like this: “Son of Adam, where art thou? Where goest thou? You're camped on this beach, but where are you supposed to be?”

That same challenge existed in more modern days. When the Church was in its youth, because of persecution, it was moved to Kirtland, Ohio. And God had given Joseph Smith a commandment that he was to build a House of the Lord at Kirtland. When Joseph Smith went to Kirtland, Ohio, the gathering of the Saints had already begun, and there were people gathering in Kirtland from all over the world. People were coming from Europe, people coming from all over the United States. And when they came, they came mostly with the possessions which they had, which were few. They had no farms, they had no houses, and they had no employment. They had little sustenance. What were they going to do to live? How were they going to survive there? Joseph and others in the leadership of the Church became preoccupied with finding farms that they could till, and land upon which they could build houses, and ways to obtain clothing to put on their back, and to prepare them for the winter, which can be very egregious there.

And as they were thus working diligently to preserve the needs of the people, the Lord came to the Prophet Joseph Smith, as recorded in the 95<sup>th</sup> section of the Doctrine and Covenants. Here's what it says, verse three: “For ye have sinned against me a very grievous sin that ye have not considered the great commandment in all things that I have given unto you concerning the building of mine house.” And if I skip a little bit—“Yea, verily, I say unto you, I gave unto you a commandment that you should build a house... in the which house I design to endow those whom I have chosen with power from on high.” (Verses 3 & 8)

Was Joseph Smith doing good things? He was. Was the Lord happy about it? He wasn't. Why? Joseph Smith was so focused on the journey on the earth, he began to lose sight of the journey to eternal life. God knew what Joseph didn't know; namely that it would not be many days before Kirtland would be lost to the Church and the Saints would be gone. And what would protect them? Not the farms that they were acquiring, not the houses they were building, not the planting that they had accomplished. These would be gone. And what would save them? What mattered most? Nothing mattered more than those ordinances to be given in the House of the Lord which are essential to the journey for eternal life.

Now all that is old history. Why does that matter to you? Well, it does matter, because the journey that you are on is the journey to eternal life, and Satan knows it. And history shows he is very capable when it comes to diverting people from that journey.

Think about the journey in which you are now engaged. You are all here engaged in an institution of higher learning, of considerable repute and reputation, I must say. And why are you here? You're here to gain education, to prepare yourselves. And is that good? It is. But does this marvelous education distract you from your journey to eternal life? And if it does, in what do you do about it?

I know that some of you are returned missionaries, because there's a young man right here that I met some months ago when I toured the Winnipeg Canada Mission—so I know that there are some returned missionaries here. There are some of you that probably have not yet served. If our journey requires that we learn about the gospel of Jesus Christ, one of the most critical things we can do is to learn about the gospel in the service of the Lord as a full-time missionary. If your education seems too important to serve a full-time mission, ask yourself, would God say to me, "Son of Adam, where art thou? Where goest thou?" If you're committed to something that diverts you from that journey to eternal life, you are camped on the beach.

Of course, for returned missionaries, the journey is not over and for some of you sisters who have other plans, a mission is not required. The scriptures are a guide to that all important journey and must become a part of the lives of all of us. What do we do with them? Do they sit home on the counter, to be read between 12:01 and 12:02 midnight every night? When you have an exam the next day, it's important to study for those exams and it's important to succeed. But somewhere in your schedule, you've got to make time for that journey that leads to eternal life. Satan will tell you there is always something more important than that journey.

I'd like to remind you of an event which you all know so well. Remember the sons of Mosiah who committed themselves to be full-time missionaries, and who turned away the kingdom of their father so that they could go preach to the Lamanites? I want to talk about one of them—Ammon. And there's one of my favorite parts of the story in Alma 17. Ammon goes into the land of the Lamanites, and he comes to the kingdom ruled over by King Lamoni. He's outside the city and people see him, and they suspect him of being a Nephite enemy so the guards leap upon him, they bind him hand and foot. They bring him before the king. And the king has power to put him to death. Ammon begins to speak. Now, we know some of the things that he spoke, but we cannot reproduce the way he spoke. We can tell he spoke by the power of the Spirit. The reason you know that is because King Lamoni became pleased at what he said. So The king was so impressed that he wanted Ammon to take his daughter to be his wife. (See Alma 17:20-24)

What do you think about that? Do you think that if Ammon was the son-in-law of the king that he would live in a prison or a shack at the edge of town? He is going to live in the palace. Do you think that Ammon is going to wear rags, like many of those missionaries sometimes did? He's not. He's going to have the finest clothes in the entire kingdom. Do you think that he is going to eat poor quality food? No. He'll have the best there is to offer. How do you think he will get around in the city? Do you think he will walk? He'll be in the very best chariot that can be made available. For Ammon, this offer was not just an offer of the king's favor, it was an offer of a lifetime. What could he have said? I think he could have rationalized many things here. "You know, if you're in

the household of the king, you can do a lot of missionary work, couldn't you? You could! If you were in the household of the king people wouldn't turn you away when you knocked on the door."

There was only one problem. He was a full time missionary. King Lamoni, who I believe at the moment he extended this offer really had high regard for Ammon, was making an offer which, had Ammon accepted it, would have destroyed the missionary work he was called to do. You see, Lamoni was acting as a tool of Satan, but he didn't know it. He didn't even intend it. He intended to do a good thing, but it was a temptation to Ammon to put the things of the world ahead of those of eternal life. Ammon knew it. So he simply said, "Nay, but I will be thy servant."

If God had appeared in that meeting with Ammon and the king, and he had said, "Ammon, son of Adam, where art thou? Where goest thou?" we know what Ammon would say: "I am a missionary. I can't accept the offer of the king. I will instead be his servant." Ammon was not camped on the beach. He was committed to the journey to eternal life. (See Alma 17:25)

Let us consider the essential ordinances of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every single one of you here, every person in this room, needs to partake of every essential ordinance which God has decreed upon this earth to lead us to eternal life. And what are those ordinances? Well, we know about faith, repentance, baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. And yes, they are important. We know about Melchizedek priesthood for the brethren, and we know about enjoying Melchizedek priesthood blessings for the brethren and the sisters, because that comes to us through the endowment and the sealing power. The endowment and the sealing are essential ordinances. Where are you with respect to those ordinances?

Where are you with respect to thinking about your journey to eternal life? If Satan can divert you from the essential ordinances, he can divert you from that journey to eternal life. One way he can deprive you of the ordinances is through sin. Anytime that Satan can lead you into a transgression, he can deprive you of the blessings of essential ordinances. All ordinances are effective only to the degree that they are sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise, which blessings are shed only upon those who are just and true. (Doctrine and Covenants 76:53)

What does Satan do? He tells you "Lie a little, take advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor, there's no harm in this. God will beat us with a few stripes, and then we shall be saved in the kingdom of God" (2Ne 28:8). Satan tells you it doesn't make any difference if an image comes up on the Internet or on the television screen which is inappropriate. He whispers that lingering on that image is not a big problem"—until pornography becomes so much a part of your life that you're not either entitled to or inclined to partake of the essential ordinances of eternal life. Breaking the law of chastity? Oh, yes, it can be repented of, but it will keep you out of the ordinances until repentance is done, and the repentance is long and painful and many have not the courage or stamina to repent of it. Integrity and honesty will help you on your journey but drugs can exclude you from partaking of the ordinances.

Sometimes we don't partake of essential ordinances, not because of sin, but because we don't prioritize them above other good things of the world. I'd like to share with you one example.

One of the ordinances that each and every one of us need is that of being sealed in the new and everlasting covenant. Point of fact is, you need to be married in the Temple. Now, I'll talk to the young men in this group first. You know, young men, you will never get to the celestial kingdom unless you have a wife. You will not go there alone. Do you understand that?

You know, young women, the rule for you is slightly different. Yes, you have to be married. But for you the promise is, God will provide every worthy woman the opportunity for a celestial marriage. Everybody gets a chance. You young men have a greater responsibility. Of course all will have opportunity to marry but in our culture, you young men typically have many opportunities to marry in this life where some young women may not. There are some social issues in our Church that sometimes divert us from this journey to eternal life. I'd like to share with you a couple of examples.

There was a study done of LDS singles. What do you think was one of the greatest concerns of young women? Listen up, young men; you're going to want to know this. One of the greatest concerns was that they didn't know if they could find anyone who would make a permanent commitment to them. I'm talking about a permanent commitment; I'm not talking about two months or two years or ten years, I'm talking about time and eternity. They didn't believe that many men were willing to make a permanent commitment to a wife. They were worried about that. For that reason, a number of young women have chosen to find themselves an education and a career to protect themselves against the event that they find themselves without a companion down the road. I'm seeing nodding heads here.

Is that a serious problem? It can be. Should young women have education and careers? They should, unless education and career become of greater importance than the journey to eternal life. Now young men, society has changed the way in which some young men feel about things. You know why that is? Listen young ladies! Young men get nervous because often the young women they date seem smarter, better educated and sometimes better employed than they are.

That means that some young men are not going to be willing to do anything serious with respect to marriage until they've got their education completed, a job—a good job, drive a nice car—hopefully red sports car, have a down payment on a house, and then and only then do they want to get serious. And between then and now, instead of doing anything serious about dating where they're really doing investigation for companionship; they do this thing called “hanging out,” which means you don't have to make any commitments at all. They can show up when they want, wave at everybody, leave, and then tell their bishop they are doing their best.

This is a danger, and the reason it's a danger is because it reflects where you are on the path to eternal life. If God stood before you and said, “Son or daughter of Adam, where are you? Where are you going?” What would you say? If all you are worried about is concerns over temporal things, if you are not willing to take the step in the dark, if you are not willing to go beyond what you have courage to do in accomplishing that great sealing ordinance, you are camped on the beach and God will not be happy.

Even when all the ordinances are done, there's still adversity. Do you worry about what the future will be like in the world you live in? Terrorism, dissolution of families, and unpredictable economy are common subjects of news reports. You might say, “What's going to happen to me?” Well, you don't have to worry about it as long as what

you do is driven by a dedication to the journey toward eternal life. The journey to eternal life does not end when you get out of school. It doesn't end when you get married. It doesn't end when you get children, or even grandchildren. It doesn't even end when you get old.

You can sometimes observe in people their commitment to the journey to eternal life. I want to share with you one brief experience. Some time ago, I was privileged to go with a mission president to the Central African Republic. There we have a branch of the Church in the city of Bangui. The mission president had never been there before, and neither had I. But the branch had not been visited for some time, and we were concerned about it so we flew there. We were met by the first counselor in the branch who was a young man, a university student studying in medical school.

We asked him about the branch president. He told us the branch president had not been there for a number of months because of a rebellion in the country. The tribe to which the branch president belonged was accused of being responsible for the rebellion and it was not safe for the branch president to stay there. He got on an airplane with his family and he flew back to France.

I asked this young man to describe the challenges he was dealing with in his branch. He said the big challenge was the lack of priesthood leadership to help administer the Church. Later in the day, we held a church meeting with about 35 or 40 people in this little house that had been rented for the Church to meet in, and as I sat on the stand, I looked to the congregation and saw a man and his wife and four small children. I asked about that man. He looked to me like he could be a priesthood leader.

The counselor told me that he had once served as the clerk in the branch presidency. But he made a mistake. Some people came looking for some economic help, and they were hungry, so he took tithing money and he gave it to them so they could buy food. The mission president who supervised this branch wasn't happy with that decision. He taught this man that one can never use tithing money for that purpose; use fast offering money, but not tithing money. And to teach him the importance of carefully administering the sacred funds of the Church, he put him on probation for three months. That is, for three months he couldn't take the sacrament, or hold a Church job. At the end of three months it was expected that he would have learned his lesson and the probation lifted.

I asked if he had been faithful during his probation.

He said, "Oh, yes. He attends Church every week with his wife and his children.—and he sits right there where you see him now."

I said, "How long has it been since he was placed on probation?"

He said, "That was eight years ago."

"Eight years ago? He's been coming every week for eight years and he can't take the sacrament, he can't hold a Church job because of a probation that was to last three months? How did that happen?"

He said that they had had a war, and the mission president couldn't come back. And then they changed mission presidents, and the next mission president just never came. And in fact, he said we were the first priesthood leaders that had come there in eight years.

Well, we fixed it. But I would like to ask you to ponder this question: Would you be willing to be faithful under those circumstances for eight years? I like to think that if

God asked, "Brother, where are you," his response would be apparent to all because he was so obviously willing to patiently do whatever God wanted him to do. That is evidence of pursuing the journey of eternal life. This man was willing to come to Church faithfully for eight years in the face of a forgotten three-month suspension.

My brothers and sisters, the path to eternal life is before you, but there are many risks of detour. Only you know whether you are on a detour or not. I pray that when you kneel at your bed at night and ask God how you're doing with Him, you might change your position and in your mind's eye, ask yourself this question: "Son of Adam, or daughter of Adam, where art thou on that path toward eternal life? Where art thou going in this life?" If that perspective is brought home, you will know what I know, and that is that the Lord Jesus Christ lives and He directs this Church. Every thing that happens in this life to us can be for our benefit if we will simply choose that path which leads us to eternal life. And the path lies before each and every one of you to reach that destination which is already prepared for you. Your name is on the door. All you have to do is want it bad enough to stay on that path and stay off the beach.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.