



Worshiping the Living Christ

by
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It's wonderful to be invited to come to LDS Business College to speak to you in a devotional. As I look out upon you, the students, I'm impressed. I've never seen a finer-looking group of young people in my life, and I've had a lot of experience at teaching and visiting colleges throughout the country. I'm proud of you. I know your parents are proud of you. I know that President Woodhouse and the faculty are proud of the wonderful students that attend this great college. I have had the privilege of working with graduates of LDS Business College, and they are good people. They are well-prepared. They are able. They are confident.

So, I look into your faces and see your potential. What you are going to contribute is a result of your having entered this school and is a result of the preparation that you have made before coming here and the things that you will do hereafter. Education is a great blessing.

We've talked in the introduction that I spent five years in Africa, and I have loved every minute that I have been there. This great continent, three and a half times larger than the United States, has some of the most marvelous natural resources—petroleum, gold, diamonds, cobalt and chromium. It has agricultural resources that are beyond comparison.

Africa is one of the great promised lands of this world, and its most wonderful resource is its people. These wonderful people that I've had the privilege of working with over the past 60 months, I pay tribute to them. I express my love to them, my confidence in them. It's interesting that when the great explorer missionary David Livingston died on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, he asked before he died that his heart be buried there under a tree and the rest of his body be returned to England.

I didn't die over there, but I want you to know that I left part of my heart there, and it's not the natural resources and

the beauty and the animals and the birds; it's the sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father that live there. I have learned to love them.

I wish there was time for me to tell you about the growth of the Church there. The first missionaries came within months of that glorious revelation that President Spencer W. Kimball received in June of 1978. By November of that year, the first missionaries arrived. Do you know that in 20 years membership in that continent has gone from about 10,000 members to over a 130,000? The rate of growth, if you're good with your math, is logarithmic. It's just going like this: the number of stakes, the temple in Johannesburg, the announcement by President Hinckley of a temple in Accra, Ghana, and other temples to be built there. Africa will become to this church what Brazil and the Philippines have become—senders of rapid, strong growth.

The marvelous thing is—not that we prefer men in any way, but one of the difficulties that the church has in its beginnings is getting a solid foundation of priesthood leadership—well, in Africa over a third of the converts are adult men, with retention, we can't really count it, but it must be 90 percent plus among that group. So, the stakes and the districts and the missions are endowed with great priesthood leadership and valiant, faithful women and strong families. It's wonderful to participate in that work there.

I pay tribute to those that sang so well in Swahili. I don't speak Swahili, but it rings like music to my ears. Thank you for that and for this marvelous choir that we have here today.

I want to bring you the greetings of our prophet. I was in the temple a week ago with President Hinckley. You know, he is just as vibrant as he was 40 years ago, full of energy, strong voice, and a remarkable mind. I had the privilege of traveling with him when he visited five countries in Africa, and he is an exceptional man. Just to sit at his side and listen to him

speaking, whether it's in a priesthood meeting or a general member session, this man speaks with great prophetic power. I watched him speak to presidents of countries, and he was at home—comfortable—and they were comfortable with him. I watched him in Ghana being interviewed by the national broadcasting company for a half hour. Then he went on to national television for one hour.

Here he was in his 89th year and he'd been going all day, from early morning to now it was eight, nine o'clock at night. I was worn out just trying to keep up with him. Not President Hinckley—as long as he could do something to bring The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints out of darkness and obscurity, he had unlimited energy, like a Duracell battery. (You've seen them advertised on television, how they just keep going.) Talk about the renewing of a body, how a man of his age can keep going. If I outline to you his schedule of this week, it would tire you to hear about it.

But, I bring you his love. He would like to be here and if he were here, he would tell you that he loved you. He would tell you that Heavenly Father loves you even more than he does, even more than your parents do. Sometimes we forget that we have a Father in Heaven who knows us.

Thank you for that hymn, "I am a Child of God." I hope that every one of you, deep in your heart of hearts, knows, recognizes, remembers who you are. I hope you'll never forget not only who you are but what your potential is. We talk of heaven. We talk of returning back into the presence of our Heavenly Father, but brothers and sisters that isn't alone what it is all about. The scriptures declare, "Ye are gods" (Ps. 82:6).

Jesus taught that doctrine. He was accused of blasphemy because he said he was the son of the Father, the Only Begotten Son. He declared that the rest of them were children of God. Brothers and sisters, never forget it. It isn't enough to return back into the presence of our Heavenly Father. We have the potential to become as he is. That's not where I am now. That's not where you are, but that's what we're striving for. That's our potential. That's why we're here upon the earth—to do those things—to have that faith, to return the love that he has for us.

Jesus said:

"If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Why does he want us to keep his commandments? So that we can be like him and be like our Heavenly Father. You know, I think of what happened in the meridian of time. What a wonderful scripture is in John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Brothers and sisters, that's love. God so loved you and me that he allowed his only begotten son, his firstborn son in the spirit world, to descend out of heaven to be born of Mary, to take upon himself mortality like you and I have, then to live a

sinless life—a life of virtue, a life of purity, a life of unselfishness.

Then after he finished his ministry, after he told the truth, after he had taught them, after he had given them an opportunity to accept his teachings and in turn they had reviled him. Toward the end of his ministry he meets with his apostles in the upper room. He teaches them and they break bread and drink the cup. He teaches them—take this in remembrance of my body, in remembrance of my blood. They didn't comprehend, they didn't fully comprehend, what yet was to happen.

We know that after that stirring scene in the upper room, he went out to his garden of Gethsemane outside the walls of the holy city. Judas had separated himself from the other 11 and gone his way to betray the Savior. Jesus left the apostles. He took Peter, James, and John and asked them to watch, and then he went a bit further by himself, there in that garden.

I hope that we comprehend and remember what happened in the garden. It's not just what happened in the garden, it's not just what happened as he was nailed to the cross, but there out in the garden. We read that as he talked he asked Father if it be possible, let this not have to happen, but thy will be done, not my will be done. We read that an angel came and strengthened him as he prayed in the garden. Great drops of blood appeared upon his body so great was the emotional, the mental torment of that moment as he took upon himself the sins of the world to atone for Adam's transgression. He atoned for my sins and your sins.

My young brothers and sisters, this is ultimate love—to be willing to die, to bleed, to suffer for someone else so that we could return back into the presence of our Heavenly Father, so that we could be like our Heavenly Father. I'm so grateful for my Savior, that he suffered in the garden, that then he allowed himself to be taken by Roman soldiers.

Remember how Peter, the impetuous Peter, drew the sword and cut the ear off of one of the people that were there, and the Savior restrained Peter? He could have called down legions of angels from heaven to protect him had that been the plan. The ear of the centurion is healed. Jesus is taken. He's given a crown of thorns.

You know, I never understood what a crown of thorns was like until I went to Africa. I guess about the worst thorn I'd ever seen was the sting of a rose, but you haven't seen the thorn until you've seen the thorn bush, an acacia. The thorns are long and needle sharp.

Do you realize they made a crown of thorns and put it on his head? It wasn't just resting there, but they took a board and then pressed it down unto his flesh. He was scourged and then forced to carry that wooden cross to the hill. By now, the experience in the garden and the scourging—I can talk to you about the medical consequences of scourging that he received, the pain and what it does to the human body—it is no

wonder that he couldn't carry that heavy, wooden beam and stumbled. Then one of the Roman centurions required someone else to carry it for him up to the hill Golgotha. They proceeded and there the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords was nailed to that cross and suspended in a vertical position with a thief on either side of him.

Brothers and sisters, that's love, that's the motivating power. He so loved you and I that he was willing to experience those kinds of torment—physical, spiritual, emotional—and he had to do it all alone.

I don't know if you know about crucifixion, but it is one of the most painful ways to die. What happens is you slump on that cross hanging by those nails. You cannot breathe, and so in order to breathe you have to stand up on that nail that is holding your ankle to the cross.

Can you imagine the pain of being supported by a nail through your ankles? Then you can breathe, but you can't sustain that because of the pain. Becoming tired, you slump down again hang by your arms. Unless you do it you can't breathe. So then you stand up again and breathe. Then you slump down, you stand, you breathe, and it is painful. The remarkable thing is that process continues for hours. That's why when the Roman soldiers came—because it was the eve of the Passover they couldn't leave the three on the cross—to their surprise Jesus was already dead. They had to break the legs of the two thieves. When you break legs then they can't stand, and they can't breathe and they suffocate as the ending moment of a horrible, cruel death.

Why was Jesus no longer alive? Because he had the power over life and death. He had atoned for my sins and your sins, for everyone, all of the sins of all of our Heavenly Father's sons and daughters—those that came to earth before Jesus, those that lived while Jesus was on the earth and all those who would live down until the last birth—when he had suffered, bled, and died for their transgressions. Then he could give up the ghost which he voluntarily did. Remember, he said, "It is finished..." (John 19:30).

He'd done it; he'd completed it—his mission of love which required suffering and pain, humiliation. When it was completed, he gave up the ghost.

Brothers and sisters, I'm thankful for that Jesus Christ. There's no way that you or I could accomplish what needs to be done in order to return back into the presence of our Heavenly Father. You and I cannot do it alone. We're expected to get as close as we can, but there will always be a gap between where we are and where we need to be to return back into the presence of Heavenly Father. You know what fills that gap, what pays that ransom, and makes up for that difference between what we can get through our own striving, our own obedience, our own diligence? Jesus Christ's atonement, that mercy, that grace. He's paid the ransom, and if we will just do all that we can do, if we repent when we make a mistake, then through the atoning blood of our Lord and

Savior Jesus Christ we can become clean and pure and worthy to return into the presence of Heavenly Father. Not just to be there with him, but to be like him through the atoning blood of his only begotten, this firstborn of the Father. I so testify of Jesus Christ; I know that he lives.

Many times in Africa I was asked, why don't you have a cross in your chapel, aren't you Christian? Then I told them of course we're Christians. Interesting story—one man in Johannesburg saw the angel Moroni on the top of the temple and he asked me, "Do you worship that figure on the top of your temple?" All of the Afrikaans, the Dutch reformed churches, have a weather vane on the top of their cathedrals. I said, "Do you worship the chicken on the top of your cathedral?" He looked at me and he said, "You need not to say anymore." He understood. They put a chicken on theirs and we put an angel on ours.

Why do we put an angel on our temples? Because we're announcing the fulfillment of that prophecy in the book of Revelations 14:6. Remember how John on the Island of Patmos, looking down through the ages, looking into the latter days said:

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel... [for] every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."

We announce to the world that that figure on our temples is fulfillment, latter-day fulfillment, of John's prophecy of what would occur in the latter days—a restoration, a dispensation of the fullness of times.

Returning to no cross, it has become the symbol of protestant and the orthodox churches—the cross. Well, I can illustrate that. Years ago, we were invited to attend the New York World's Fair. This was in the day and age when world fairs were really big things. They went on for days. They had pavilions from almost every nation, and the religious organizations had pavilions. In the Mormon pavilion, we featured Thorvaldsen's statue of the Savior Jesus Christ. It's called The Christus. It was done by Thorvaldsen, a Danish sculptor. The original is in Our Lady Church in Copenhagen, and the Church has an exact replica. You see it in the information center down on Temple Square. The first time the Church used it was in the New York World's Fair; and it was a marvelous, living, monumental display of our belief in Christ.

The Catholic pavilion had a beautiful Michelangelo statue called the Pieta. It's the mother Mary with the crucified Savior, the body of the Savior in her arms. It's done in beautiful marble, and it is a majestic work of art.

So, in the Catholic pavilion you went by the Pieta by standing on what seemed to be like an escalator, only it didn't go up by conveyer belt. The many, many that went in there went by, and it was dark and there were search lights on the statue. That white marble just looked beautiful—the sorrow, the sadness of the crucified, dead Savior in the arms of his mother.

Well, we walked out of the Mormon pavilion, behind a group of nuns after they had seen Man's Search for Happiness and looked at the exhibit of the Savior and the plan of salvation. My wife and I were walking just to the back and to the side, and I think they summed up exactly. They said, "It's interesting to contrast the Mormon pavilion with the Catholic pavilion." They said, "They in the Mormon pavilion here are featuring the living Christ while we are showing the dead Christ." And that's why we told the people in Africa that the cross, the crucifix, isn't our symbol. Our symbol is the living Christ. We bear testimony to the world that he lives.

I bear testimony that my redeemer lives; and although the cross was a very necessary, important part of his redemptive act, the good news is not that he died on the cross. Brothers and sisters, the good news is that the tomb was empty on the third day. That's what we celebrate, that the only begotten of the Father came to earth, took upon himself mortality, suffered, bled, and died; and his body was laid in that tomb. But we celebrate that three days later, when Mary and the other women and the apostles went to the tomb, it was empty. He is not there; he is risen, and Mary bore testimony to the world through the ages that she saw him—not just Mary, the other women, the 11 apostles, and then 500.

Then his appearance on the American continent is recorded in 3 Nephi 11. There the people are gathered in the land Bountiful around the temple, and that's where you and I would go if there was terrible destruction. It wouldn't matter where we lived. When it was all over we'd go to the temple, and they were gathered there.

You remember the story, different continent, some months after his resurrection, after his ascension into heaven in Palestine. As they are talking about the great destruction that had taken place, they hear a voice, and it's a soft voice that penetrates deep into their hearts. They understood it not. The second time they heard the voice and understood it not, but then the scripture says they opened their ears and they looked up to where the voice had come and they heard our Heavenly Father declare that this is my beloved son who has glorified my name. They understood the third time. They saw this magnificent being ascending out of heaven. Wouldn't you want to be there? Wouldn't it be wonderful if each one of you and I could've had that experience? He comes down and stands in their midst. Even though they heard the voice of God the Father declaring who it was, they couldn't comprehend it. They thought it was an angel, and then this magnificent being declares to them that he is Jesus Christ who has died to fulfill the will of the Father. What do they do? They did exactly as you and I would do. They fell down to worship him. This great, resurrected being then beckons them to stand up. He declares who he is and what he has done. Then remarkably, he invites the multitude.

We read in 3 Nephi 17 that there were about 2,500 people—men, women and children—in that multitude. He

invites them to come forth, to feel the prints of the nails in his hands, to thrust their hands into the wound in his side that was made by the Roman gladiator who pierced his body as he hung lifeless on the cross. We read that one by one, they did go forth and felt the prints of the nails in his hands and thrust their hands in his side. They did know; there was no question. They did know, for they had heard him, they had seen him, they had felt those defects in his body, and they did know that this was the resurrected Lord. We celebrate his resurrection.

We celebrate that in answering the prayer of a boy in his 15th year, Joseph Smith, that this same resurrected Jesus Christ appeared with his father, descending in a pillar of light as Joseph was kneeling in that grove of trees. We know that Joseph had gone there in answer to a promise that if a man lacks wisdom, he can ask God. I bear testimony of the power of prayer, that prayers are answered, that Joseph Smith's prayer was answered. That Elohim, our Heavenly Father, and our beloved Savior, Jesus Christ, appeared in that grove of trees in upstate New York. And other witnesses, Joseph Smith and Sydney Rigdon, in the 76th section of the Doctrine and Covenants said:

"This is the testimony, last of all which we give of him: That he lives! For we saw him, even on the right hand of God" (D&C 76:22-23).

It is true, brothers and sisters. It is true. It is true that your potential is to be like God, to be a God. That's not where we are today; but through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that's what we can become.

Let me caution you in conclusion. It's the small things that make a big difference. I have another church assignment. It's a committee that reports to the first presidency and it's called the Committee on the Restoration of Blessings and Cancellation of Sealings. I think you can understand that it deals with temple covenants and unfortunately broken temple covenants. I want to share with you that most of these covenants are broken because of little, small things. That's where they begin. A small thing grows and grows and grows, until it consumes if we are not willing to acknowledge what we are doing is wrong and repent and seek the spirit of the Lord.

What are those small things? It's interesting; pornography is in the background of so much of this—surfing the Internet in areas that people should never be. I'm talking about people of the covenant, the believing blood of Israel. It's going to the wrong places, being in the wrong places, being with the wrong people. It's little things that start out small that develop into huge cancers that stop our progress toward immortality and eternal life.

I'll never forget a patriarchal blessing, my patriarchal blessing. I was a little older; it was just months before I went on a mission. I hadn't yet made up my mind whether I should be a missionary. It was a terrible mistake, what a terrible

thing if I hadn't gone on a mission. It was the greatest blessing in my life. I had friends that did not keep the Word of Wisdom and did not live up to Church standards. They were not members of the Church and I was going to be a good friend. They went into places where beverages were served that are forbidden by the Word of Wisdom and other things happened. I thought I could go in there and have ginger ale and not look, and that I could get away with that. Isn't it interesting that a patriarch who didn't know anything about me or what I was doing would lay his hands upon my head; and as he gave that patriarchal blessing, declared my lineage, and that I was of a noble birthright. He then said:

“Brother Mason, never go into a place where you cannot take the spirit of the Lord.”

I don't know that he even understood what those words meant. Of course he knew what they meant, but what they meant to me. It was just like a bomb going off. I knew exactly what it meant, and I knew that it was an inspired warning from my Heavenly Father. Don't go there. If you can't do that—if you can't go there without leaving the spirit of the Lord behind, the Holy Ghost—then don't do it, because that's

the beginning. That's a little thing that starts that downward trail away from our potential to become like God.

I love you brothers and sisters. I can see your potential, not just as good employees but as fathers and mothers, husbands and wives; but I see you in some exalted sphere, gods and goddesses with all of the freedom and the rights and the privileges and the opportunities. Don't sell your birthright for another. Don't do it. Don't do it.

I testify the gospel is true. God lives. Jesus is the resurrected Lord, our Savior and Redeemer. Everything Joseph Smith said he saw, everything Joseph Smith said he heard, is true and I so testify to you. I know it's true; I know that we have a living prophet upon the earth today. If we'll walk in obedience to the scriptures and the living prophets and apostles, we can reach this magnificent potential—gods in embryo. Let's do it.

The Lord bless you. These choicest blessings—may he protect you; may he watch over you; may he give you strength to make the right decisions to not get involved in the little things that would destroy you and turn you from your heavenly potential.