

The Stewardship of Priesthood Sermon
by President Elbert A. Smith
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Presiding Patriarch
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Called by Frederick M. Smith
Predecessor Frederick A. Smith
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Counselor in the First Presidency
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AN AUTHORITATIVE PRIESTHOOD

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists ; and some, pastors ,and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by; the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.-Ephesians 4: 11-15

In the stewardship of priesthood there must be at least three factors, viz, authority, responsibility, and opportunity. It may not be easy or even possible to separate them. They are quite closely intertwined: "A threefold cord is not easily broken." I hardly know how to consider one without the others. Certainly, no man could exercise authority in the priesthood and escape responsibility; and it would be most unfair to ask a man in any position to assume responsibility

and deny him authority. But I shall perhaps have to talk about these factors one at a time, so I shall take up first the question of authority.

Brethren, remember this, we have an authoritative religion. Some years ago, Doctor Charles W. Eliot, resident emeritus of Harvard, said, "Whatever the religion of the future may be, it will not be a religion of authority." He meant by that, I presume, that it will not be a religion that in any sense came to men from above, but one that shall rise up out of the human soul, out of its experiences, and meet the approval of the human conscience-the "evolution of religion" from within man, supported by the voice and the conscience of the people.

Now that would be perfectly all right if in the beginning we came by accident and have developed without guidance. That would be a good enough religion for me if I believe that, because I would not have use for any religion at all. But we are committed to the initial postulate of scripture: "In the beginning God created." To the created being, he revealed his religion. Our religion most certainly did come down from above. It may and it truly does have approval of our conscience and is justified by our experiences; but it came not from man; neither was it taught us by man.

We have an authoritative doctrine. Jesus said when he was here as a man, *"My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."* -John 7: 16, 17.

We have an authoritative organization. "God set in the church" apostles, prophets, teachers, and so on, as stated in 1 Corinthians 12: 28. And as stated also in the very splendid introduction to section 17 of the Book of Doctrine and Covenants:

The rise of the church of Christ in these last days, being one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh, it being regularly organized and established agreeably to the laws of our country, by the will and commandments of God.

The doctrines, these ordinances, this organization, all are to be administered by an authoritative priesthood. Christ himself came with authority. The people noticed that he "spoke as one having authority."

And we are told:

So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee, As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec. -Hebrews 5:5-6.

If Jesus came with authority as a high priest, it is equally true that he said to his disciples, *"As my Father hath sent me into the world, so send I you."*

One of his first acts in organizing his church, as chief presiding officer of that church, was to call and set aside and ordain twelve apostles. We have that recorded in Matthew (10: 1-4), and Mark gives us to distinctly understand they were not simply twelve men, twelve brethren in the fellowship of brotherhood alone, twelve ordained men (Mark 3: 14), and to them Jesus said: *"Ye*

have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." - John 15: 16. They were called; chosen, ordained, and sent forth by the Lord-an authoritative ministry. Others were similarly called-elders, bishops, seventies, evangelists, etc.

Some people have felt that we were attempting to establish in Graceland College or somewhere else a school that would presume to "make" ministers for God. Let me tell you such a thought was never in the mind of the church. We teach and trust that we ever shall teach, that no man shall be ordained until he is definitely called, and the testimony comes through some proper channel that it is God's will that he should be ordained. But then it may not be out of place in Graceland or elsewhere to help the men whom God has called to prepare themselves for their ministry: not making ministers for God but helping those called to learn their duty and go out and do it.

In these last days the priesthood was again restored and in a manner that marks us a peculiar people, unique from all other peoples, and sustains me in the statement that we have an authoritative priesthood.

Joseph Smith says concerning the restoration of the priesthood that they went out into the woods in May, 1829, and prayed, and he says:

While we were thus employed, praying, and calling upon the Lord, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us, saying unto us, "Upon you, my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion, for the remission of sins ; and this shall never be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness." He said this Aaronic priesthood had. not the power of laying on of hands, for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but that this should be conferred on us hereafter; and he commanded us to go and be baptized, and gave us directions that I should baptize Oliver Cowdery, and afterwards that he should baptize me. Accordingly, we went and were baptized. I baptized him first, and afterwards he baptized me, after which I laid my hands upon his head and ordained him to the Aaronic priesthood, and afterwards he laid his hands on me and ordained me to the same priesthood, for so we were commanded. The messenger who visited us on this occasion, and conferred this priesthood upon us, said that his name was John, the same that is called John the Baptist, in the New Testament, and that he acted under the direction of Peter, James, and John, who held the keys of the priesthood of Melchisedec, which priesthood he said should in due time be conferred on us-and that I should be called the first elder, and he the second. It was on the fifteenth day of May, eighteen hundred and twenty-nine, that we were baptized and ordained under the hand of the messenger. Immediately upon our coming up out of the water, after we had been baptized, we experienced great and glorious blessings from our heavenly Father. -Church History, vol. 1, pp. 35, 36.

Oliver Cowdery has an account of the same marvelous incident in which he says: The Lord, who is rich in mercy, and ever willing to answer the consistent prayer of the humble, after we had

called upon him in a fervent manner, aside from the abodes of men, condescended to manifest to us his will. On a sudden, as from the midst of eternity, the voice of the Redeemer spake peace to us, while the vail was parted and the angel of God came down clothed with glory, and delivered the anxiously looked for message, and the keys of the gospel of repentance; What joy! What wonder! What amazement! While the world was racked and distracted while millions were groping as the blind for the wall, and while all men were resting upon uncertainty, as a general mass, our eyes beheld-our ears heard. As in the "blaze of day"; yes, more-above the glitter of the May sunbeam, which then shed its brilliancy over the face of nature!

Then his voice, though mild, pierced to the center, and his words, "I am thy fellow servant," dispelled every fear. We listened-we gazed-we admired! 'Twas the voice of the angel from glory-'twas a message from the Most High! and as we heard we rejoiced, while his love enkindled upon our souls, and we were rapt in the vision of the Almighty! Where was room for doubt! Nowhere: uncertainty had fled, doubt had sunk, no more to rise, while fiction and deception had fled forever! But, dear brother, think, further think for a moment, what joy filled our hearts and with what surprise we must have bowed, (for who would not have bowed the knee for such a blessing?) when we received under his hand the priesthood, as he said, "Upon you my fellow-servants, in the name of Messiah, 'I confer this priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon earth, that the sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness !"- Church History, vol. 1, pp. 37, 38.

This priesthood, as restored, both Melchisedec and Aaronic, has come down to us; and the late President Joseph Smith said concerning the authority of that priesthood:

The priesthood so conferred was endowed with all the rights, privileges, and authority to bring forth the church of Christ, conduct its expansion and watch over its development and welfare until the coming of Christ should bring its work to a triumphant and glorious consummation. - SAINTS' HERALD, May 21, 1902.

The priesthood then has authority under divine direction to bring forth the church, to watch over its expansion and development and conduct its affairs until Christ himself shall come; and in so doing to preach the gospel and officiate in all the ordinances. Jesus said, *"I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in"*-Matthew 16: 19.

We used hear to a great deal about keys. We do not hear so much about them now, but keys as a symbol of authority have by no means lost their significance. When as representatives of God the priesthood officiate in the sacred ordinances, that which they do has validity on high as well as on earth. Here, we will say, is a man who has been a sinner. He is converted by the preaching of the gospel, the power of God unto salvation. He wishes to lay aside his old life with all its evil habits and sins. The minister takes him into the waters of baptism, and he is immersed as a symbol that his spirit is cleansed and his sins washed away. The minister officiates in that ordinance, and that man comes up out of the water a free man-free indeed.

"Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." And at the day when that man stands at the eternal judgment bar, if he abides in that freedom, he shall yet be a free man. And

when within the church one falls into iniquity and it becomes necessary for the priesthood of the church to invoke forces that through the tribunals and under the laws of the church shall bind him and cast him out, he is not bound alone on earth, but also in heaven. It is literally true that you have the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and what you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven, and what you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. It is yours to declare the will of God, to speak forth his word to the children of men, to state and expound his law: *"What I the Lord have spoken I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice, or by the voice of my servants, it is the same."*-Doctrine and Covenants 1: 8.

Responsibility and Opportunity

Authority brings its own responsibility. Responsibility carries with it opportunity. The great primary responsibility conferred upon the ministry was in the general commission Jesus gave: *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."*-Mark 16: 15. But then he turned to some others and said to them, *"Lovest thou me?"* They said, *"Yes, Lord."* And he said, *"Feed my sheep."* Some are to go abroad and carry the gospel to those who have never heard it. That is missionary. But some are to feed those who have heard the gospel and embraced it and become sheep of his fold. That is pastoral. We have a twofold program in the church that carries with it a twofold responsibility and a twofold opportunity. You remember Jesus said, in reply to the lawyer's question, that there were two great commandments:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. -Matthew 22: 37-39

So, we need not be surprised that in our twofold program all our responsibility and all our opportunity hang on these two great commandments. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." The missionary goes out under the commission, "Go ye and preach the gospel," to tell the world about God so that they may know him and come to him and learn to love him and so keep that first commandment. That is the missionary calling, opportunity, and responsibility. Paul felt that responsibility weighing down upon him very heavily. He was the great missionary, the outstanding missionary, perhaps, of all time, and he felt the responsibility, and his eyes were also opened to the opportunity, so that he said within himself, *"I must preach the gospel in Rome."* And he said also, *"Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"*-1 Corinthians 9: 16.

That compelling spirit within him led him to seek the most prominent places from which to sound abroad the word. He went into the courts of kings. He went to Athens, even to Mars Hill. The Mount of Olives stands out in the pages of history as symbolical of spirituality and religion, but Mars Hill stands forth as symbolical of learning and culture. It was the center and seat of intelligence and learning. Here the philosophers gathered.

Paul, as he went up the hill, noticed on every hand, altars and inscriptions to many gods. When the ancients saw the manifestation of divinity anywhere, they thought it a new god and built another altar; one god here, another there. But Paul at last came to one marked To The Great

Unknown God, which was their confession that they had as yet failed to find the one God. That was Paul's opportunity as a missionary, and he stood before them and said, "Whom ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." There are not many gods, some here, some there, but one, the great I Am, who reveals himself everywhere and always. "He is not far from any one of us."

That is the stewardship of the missionary, to carry the gospel, the revelation of God as Creator, Father, and ever-present help to the children of men, and thus set their faces definitely Zionward.

Then begins the work of the pastor. If Paul was a typical missionary, John the Beloved was a typical pastor. Read his epistles. The theme that runs all through them is the second great commandment, "Love thy neighbor." There is a tradition that when John was very, very old and could no more stand up to preach, young men would carry him before the congregation, and seated in his chair he would deliver himself of the one injunction, "Little children, love one another." In his young manhood, when he had lain upon the bosom of the Master, as he seems to have done at the Last Supper, that was the message caught from those lips, the pastoral message he had learned. That is the theme that runs through his epistle. "We love God because he first loved us." This is the message that ye heard from beginning, that we should love one another. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

So, it is the stewardship of the pastoral arm of the priesthood to gather the people together in flocks and feed them, first in groups, then in branches, then in districts, then in stakes, and last, please God, in Zion. There are certain rather specific stewardships that come along in the line of this priesthood; for example, in Doctrine and Covenants 122:2:

The burden of the care of the church is laid on him who is called to preside over the high priesthood of the church, and on those who are called to be his counselors; and they shall teach according to the spirit of wisdom and understanding, and as they shall be directed by revelation, from time to time.

And in the third paragraph:

It is the duty of the Twelve to preach the gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof, as is directed in the scriptures which ye have received. They are called and set apart to this duty; and are to travel and preach, under the direction and counsel of the presidency.

The stewardship of the President of the high priesthood and his counselors is to bear the burden of the whole church.

Again, in section 122, and elsewhere, the Lord points out the duties of the standing ministry, those in pastoral work, high priests, elders, priests, teachers, deacons, who watch over and care for the Saints. The duty of the Twelve and Seventy primarily is to carry the message abroad. These stewardships interlock. There is scarcely a missionary who is not in some sense a pastor; and every pastor is in some sense a missionary. But at least there is this difference in part; and with them, of course, the stewardship that comes to the bishops to administer the finances of the church.

It is committed to the ministry as a part of their stewardship to administer the ordinances and the sacraments, and in so doing they have part in the covenants made between immortal souls. They are witnesses who stand between God and man in these covenants, as when a man goes down in the waters of baptism and is cleansed and is committed in the eyes of the world and of the church and himself to a new life, that ordinance being a memorial that he will ever remember: the minister is the sealing witness of that ordinance, and later, placing his hands on that man's head, he implores for him the Holy Ghost and initiates him into the church, into a new fellowship and brotherhood.

Brethren of the priesthood, you come in contact with the souls of man at great epochs of life. When they are sick unto death, when their loved ones lie afflicted and their hearts are torn and humanity has no aid, they send for you to come in and anoint with oil and offer the prayer of administration.

You preside at the sacrament of the communion of the Lord's supper, when all the people kneeling before the altar in the presence of the emblems are committed to the prayer offered, that they will *"always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them."* Your hand takes to them those emblems to remind them of their Lord and Master.

You officiate when love has come into their hearts and they have in secret pledged their troth in their engagement, and they then come publicly and stand at the altar and ask you in the name of God to pronounce them husband and wife so that they may *be* free honorably in the sight of all men and under the blessing of heaven to go out and establish a home and bring children into the world. Later they bring those children to you to be blessed, and named, and set aside for holy purposes.

As pastors and priests, you are enjoined to visit the homes of all the Saints. There is no foreign mission more important or sacred than that, to go into the privacy and sacred precincts of the homes of the Saints and administer to the needs of father and mother and children. It certainly is a wonderful stewardship, a great responsibility and opportunity. And as you go out to preach, as I said to you in the class the other morning; you go first of all as representatives of Jesus Christ, the gentle man of Galilee, the gentleman of Galilee. What a stewardship! You go out to represent the church and the thousands and thousands of men and women and children of the church who trust you to speak for them. They are inarticulate. They love the gospel, but they cannot go out and preach it; they trust you, to do so for them. They pray for you, and with their tithes they support you that you may go out and, speaking for them, tell that gospel to the people, that you will tell it as powerfully as you may, and will keep yourself so clean that no smirch from your conduct will mar the message they have sent you to bear. And perhaps in the courts of glory the eyes of the dead, who in years gone by gave all they had for the gospel, look down to see whether you in your day are carrying forth the message of the Lord as they would that it might be carried.

What is the objective of this stewardship? Apostle Garver last night in his statement concerning the mission of the church gave that to you. He anticipated me on that point. All of this

stewardship, all this preaching, this baptizing and administering, all this teaching leads up to one great objective: "Till we all come to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

CONCLUSION

It is presumed under the laws of homiletics (*the art of preaching or writing sermons*) that the climax of the sermon, the closing thoughts, should sum it up or grow out of it, and it may be that what I have to say in conclusion will appear to wander away from the subject; but if I violate the laws of homiletics and offend any of the brethren, at least the sisters will stand by me; and if they be for me, who shall be against me?

It is not given to woman to have the stewardship of priesthood. No; she is not asked to bear the stewardship of priesthood. All that she is asked to do is to go down into the valley of travail from whence come new souls and come up out of that valley bearing in her arms the male child that shall be a priest; to take him to her bosom and feed him and warm him and clothe him; and as he grows older, to teach the priest, who later shall teach the people. When he grows to manhood and becomes the very apple of her eye, as beautiful to her as Apollo, as wise as Solomon, as brave as Daniel, and as good as John the Beloved, when she has invested in him all that she has and all that she is and all she ever expects to have and to be, then to give him to the church and to God; to pray for him all the days of his ministry; and when she has grown old in body and fatal disease has set its hand upon her and she stands in the valley of the shadow of death between the pillars of eternal mystery, to bear, as my good mother did, her last testimony to the divinity of this work that will ring like a golden bell in the heart of her son forever; perchance later to come back unseen and invisible to observe her son and see whether he has kept the trust.

No, it is not given to woman to have the stewardship of priesthood; but every priest sometime is the stewardship of some woman.

I was down in Oklahoma City some months ago, and some one said to me, "Sister Sorden wants to see you. You know Sister Sorden, the mother of Dan, who is over in Jerusalem on a mission. She wants to know if you have time to talk with her?" Why, certainly, if anybody had claim upon my time it was she. So, she came and said, "Brother Smith; what about my son, Dan?" Well, Dan had been gone a long time--two years, three years, four years, five years, six years, in a foreign field, when every day of those six years if she could have had him with her it would have been worth more to that mother than all the oil wells of Oklahoma. So, I said to her, "It must have been a great cross to you to have him gone so long. "Oh, Brother Smith," she said, "I don't care where my son is or how long he stays just so he is engaged in the work of the Lord."

I was in Plano and stayed in the humble home of Brother and Sister W. A. McDowell. I thought many times while there of that sister had sent her husband, Brother W. A. McDowell; forth a missionary all these years, and now her son Oliver as a pastor in Michigan, and Floyd as a member of the Presidency--three ministers to whom she had said, "Go preach." When I bade her goodbye, I felt honored to put my arm around her shoulder and kiss her good-by. Brother Joseph used to say to the ministry, "If you must kiss the women kiss the grandmothers." And as I kissed

her goodbye, she said, "Take my love to my son Floyd." She seemed to rise up in stature as she said, "Take my love to my *son-my son* Floyd."

No; it is not given to woman to have the stewardship of priesthood, but every high priest has been some woman's stewardship.

Perchance a woman shall marry a missionary. She does not have to preach. I heard a missionary's wife say, "I thank God I don't have to preach." All she has to do is to let him go, and cheerfully tell him good-by so his going may not be hard to him; to stay behind, manage the household, stoke the furnace, manage the business affairs; to be husband and wife, to be mother and father, to love gently like a mother and discipline firmly like a father; when she writes him, to write cheerful letters and leave out the matters that might make him homesick; and when he becomes old and is superannuated to speak to him as did Sister E. L. Kelley when she said, "Edmund, you have been in a very responsible position as Presiding Bishop, and now you are released and retired and put on the shelf, and furthermore a generation of young people will come to the work who will do things differently from what you did; but let us resolve that whatever comes we will always keep sweet."

No; woman does not have the stewardship of priesthood, but every priest is her stewardship. Emma Smith was not ordained as a priest. She could not baptize. She could not lay hands on the sick. All she could do was to stand in the doorway of the Mansion House and watch Joseph as he rode away that June morning, go out to the gate to catch the last glimpse of him as he rode over the hill to Carthage; and when the dead body was brought back to her, make a clean bed to lay him on, and after he was buried to set up the altar in her home, close her ears to appeals to go here or there, and say, I have no home but this and no friend but God; to establish her "school of religious education" and teach Joseph and Alexander and David, and later give to the church two men for the Presidency and one for the Quorum of Twelve. She did not have the stewardship of priesthood; but three high priests were her stewardship.

When Mary was crowded out so there was no place for her in human habitation and she must needs lay herself down on the straw in the manger, and the Son of God, from the courts of glory, crept into her arms, he became her stewardship. She taught him-the one who should teach all men. When she took him to the temple to be blessed, Simeon took him from her arms and said, "Mary, because of him a sword shall pierce through thy very soul." Think you that during those forty days and forty nights when he wrestled with Satan in the wilderness Mary slept? And when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane and the twelve apostles could not keep awake, not one hour to watch with him, when they who had the stewardship of priesthood all slept, do you think Mary slept? And when she saw him hanging on the cross--. No, she did not have the stewardship of priesthood; but the great high priest of our profession who entered once into the holy of holies, was a woman's stewardship.

So, it may finally be when his work is all done and the minister comes into the presence of God, and God says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," he will also turn to the man's wife and mother and say, "Exceedingly well done, good and faithful servants; enter in also with him into my joy. Without you, he could never have served; without you now, he could never have joy."