

What Is Man?

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It is a humbling experience to be with you this morning; it is an honor and a privilege. President Oaks, I appreciate that introduction, and the beautiful music to which we have listened, and that lovely prayer offered by Brother Spencer. I think sometimes that we do not fully appreciate the prayers that are given in our services. They come from the heart, and they are prayers unto our Heavenly Father through his beloved Son. This morning I hope and pray that I may have the Spirit of the Lord to be with me in the remarks that I make.

The religious world is confused as to who man is, and what the purpose of life is. Many have sought in vain to obtain the answers to this question. The writer of psalms has said,

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

For thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet. [Psalms 8:4–6]

Dr. James E. Talmage has also given us an answer to this question, from which I quote:

What is man in this boundless setting of sublime splendor? I answer you: Potentially now, actually to be, he is greater and grander, more precious according to the arithmetic of God, than all the planets and suns of space. For him were they created; they are the handiwork of God; man is His son! In this world man is given dominion over a few things; it is his privilege to achieve supremacy over many things.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Psa. 19:1). Incomprehensibly grand as are the physical creations of the earth and space, they have been brought into existence as means to an end, necessary to the realization of the supreme purpose, which in the words of the Creator is thus declared:

*“For behold, this is my work and my glory — to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” (Pearl of Great Price, page 4.) [James E. Talmage, *The Earth and Man*, pp. 11–12]*

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Think, then, of the great tragedy, the terrible responsibility that men take upon themselves when they treat so lightly, as is sometimes the case, the destruction of human life.

May I emphasize the statement in the foregoing quotation relative to the Son of Man and his work, namely, that it is his work and his glory to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man (Moses 1:39). The Jews, particularly the Pharisees, seemed to be very much interested in eternal life; however, they did not understand the true meaning of the term, nor how to attain eternal life. You will recall that on one occasion a Pharisee came to the Savior and asked, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" The Savior, answering him, said, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God" (Matthew 19:16–17).

On one occasion soon after I became secretary to President Grant I met Dr. James E. Talmage, one of the brethren of the Twelve, as he entered the Church administration building; and in his kindly, sociable way he greeted me with a salutation, "Good morning, Brother Anderson."

"Good morning, Dr. Talmage," I replied.

He continued, "How are you this morning?"

And I answered, "Very good, thank you, Dr. Talmage."

He then made this interesting remark, "Brother Anderson, the Lord says there is none good but one, and that is God." My answer should have been, "Very well, thank you." Elder Talmage was a great scholar and one who was very technical as to proper English. He was a member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and other scientific societies, and was also on the board of directors of Webster's Dictionary.

We are indeed vastly inferior to God. We are human, subject to the weaknesses of the flesh. He has given us the gospel of our Lord and Savior; and if we will live in accordance with the principles thereof, if we fulfill the pur-

pose that we came here to accomplish, we will become more like our Heavenly Father and obtain eternal life, that great goal for which the Lord gave his life, the goal which the Pharisee mentioned and the goal that the rich young ruler was seeking when he asked what he should do to obtain eternal life. I like the following statement by President Kimball upon this subject: "If I were to tell you in all seriousness that in your own backyard you could find an acre of diamonds, would you ignore the suggestion and take no trouble to search? Today, I am telling you with all the fervor of my soul that in easy reach there is a prize of inestimable worth. Diamonds can buy one food and shelter. Diamonds can embellish and decorate. But the prize that is within your grasp is more brilliant than jewels. It will not lose its sparkle, nor can it be stolen by thieves. I speak of the greatest gift—the gift of eternal life. It may not be obtained through mere asking; it cannot be purchased with money; hopeful wishing will not bring it; but it is available to men and women the world over who comply with the requirements" (Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, p. 83).

Everyone who accepts the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ—which one can do only through faith in the Lord, true repentance, and baptism, and the reception of the Holy Ghost when conferred by one having authority thus to act—can receive the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit to point the way to eternal life.

In the Book of Mormon we are told that when Lehi and his family were in the wilderness after leaving Jerusalem and before building a ship to take them to the promised land, Lehi "arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, [and] to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither [they] should go into the wilderness" (1 Nephi 16:10). I like to

think that in a sense each of us has the guidance of a Liahona which we call the Holy Spirit. If our life is to be a happy one we must bring our thinking, our urges, our passions under control and direct them into the proper channels—channels such as virtue, honesty, love, truth, unselfishness, and so forth. When we keep the commandments of the Lord after having fulfilled the requirements of membership, the Holy Spirit directs our way. When we fail to keep the Lord's commandments it does not work; and this, of course, was the case with the Liahona. When there was contention and wickedness among the Nephites the spindle did not point the way. The same is true in regard to the guiding influence we have through the Holy Spirit.

The Lord has given us certain gifts and talents whereby we can obtain righteous and eternal goals. Sometimes we may envy others who, we think, have talents that surpass our own. We must have faith in ourselves. We are children of our Heavenly Father. We are not necessarily like the other man, but we have our own personalities and our individual talents which, if developed, will bring us success and happiness in life. We have challenges to bring under control certain powers which, if not controlled, will result in disappointment and unhappiness. Edgar A. Guest, with whom I had the privilege of spending some time on a visit to Detroit with President Grant, has given us the following sentiments as set forth in the poem, "How Do You Tackle Your Work?"

*How do you tackle your work each day?
Are you scared of the job you find?
Do you grapple the task that comes your way
With a confident, easy mind?
Do you stand right up to the work ahead?
Or fearfully pause to view it?
Do you start to toil with a sense of dread
Or feel that you're going to do it?*

*You can do as much as you think you can,
But you'll never accomplish more; . . .*

*Success! It's found in the soul of you,
And not in the realm of luck! . . .
You can do whatever you think you can,
It's all in the way you view it. . . .*

*How do you tackle your work each day?
With confidence clear, or dread?
What to yourself do you stop and say
When a new task lies ahead?
What is the thought that is in your mind?
Is fear ever running through it?
If so, just tackle the next you find
By thinking you're going to do it.*

[Collected Verse of Edgar A. Guest, pp. 37–38]

God has given us no law which, if obeyed, will not bring us a desirable reward. We must be determined to obey God's laws if we expect the blessings.

In the New Testament, we have an account of the suffering of our Lord and Master when he was on the earth. At the conclusion of his mission, when he had arrived at the time when he was soon to lay down his life for mankind, we are told of the great agony that he underwent. Some people take the view that others have suffered as much as Christ did when he was crucified upon the cross. This is truly a mistaken idea. No man has suffered to the extent that the Savior of the world did, not only when he was hanging on the cross, but particularly when he was praying to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. We are told that so great was his suffering that he sweat drops of blood. His suffering was beyond our understanding in that he was carrying the weight of our sins. President McKay has said that the glory of mortal man is character, and it must be developed through obedience to the laws of life as set forth in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In discussing character, President McKay mentioned four pictures that had appealed to

him. First was the picture of Christ as he stood before Pilate and Pilate said to the angry mob, "Behold the man," pointing to Jesus crowned with thorns and wearing a purple robe. The angry crowd sneered and condemned him as a felon and blasphemer (see John 19:4–6). When Pilate said, "Behold the man," he referred to one who was perfect in character, a conqueror over weaknesses and temptations, one who said "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Artists over the years have attempted to portray on canvas and other wise a likeness of Christ, our Master and Savior, but none of the paintings that have been made give us a reliable portrayal of our dear Lord. It is natural that we should visualize him in our minds according to the paintings and pictures we've seen. He is indeed our great ideal. He was a man of strength: physical, mental, and spiritual. He indicated that strength when he drove the moneychangers from the temple. He was not fearful of them, but they recognized his power and his authority. The later Orson F. Whitney, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, in referring to a dream or a vision that he had of the Savior, mentioned that as he gazed up into his face he recognized that the Savior was taller than he. Elder Whitney was a large man. As I think of Elder Whitney, it seems to me that he was two or three inches taller than six feet.

The Savior passed through temptations, as does mortal man. Maybe they were not just the same as ours, but they were somewhat similar in nature. You will recall that when he was tempted by the devil, after he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry; and the tempter came to him and said, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."

He resisted that temptation and answered, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Then you will recall that the devil took him into the city, Jerusalem, and the account records, "and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."

The answer of the Master was, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

Again, the record indicated that the tempter took him to a high mountain and showed him "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

Then Jesus responded and said, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." And then it was that the devil left him (see Matthew 4:1–11). We too have temptations of various kinds. If we are going to follow the Master we must say to the evil one, as the Savior did, "Get thee hence, Satan."

The second picture that President McKay referred to was the picture of the Savior as a youth. I have seen that picture and no doubt some of you have seen it also. It depicts purity and strength in a young boy. We look upon you young men and say that if you will keep the commandments that the Lord has given you will have the character that will shine in your face and give unto you a strength that you otherwise could not have.

The third picture was a picture described by Nathaniel Hawthorne in "The Great Stone Face," a story of a boy who, as he grew to manhood, lived in an area where there was a formation of a great stone face on the mountainside. It was a picture of virtue and character. It impressed the young man so much that he looked at it time and time and time again until, as he developed in life, the same virtues that he visualized in that great stone face developed in his own life.

President McKay mentioned as a fourth picture the picture of a youth whose clear eyes indicate the strength of young manhood and the purity of the life he is living. He said, "We love [purity] in womanhood: we also love [purity] and strength in young manhood, and [these things] come as a result of true living" (David O. McKay, *Man May Know for Himself*, pp. 29–30). I am thinking of that great stone face.

Two or three years ago, I was privileged to be the author of a book entitled *Prophets I Have Known*. And on the cover of that book are imprinted profile pictures of the faces of five prophets of the living God in this dispensation: Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, David O. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Harold B. Lee. If I were writing it today I could add Spencer W. Kimball. And I also had the good pleasure to be fairly well acquainted with President Joseph F. Smith, the one who preceded President Grant. Why do I mention these men? They are not what some would normally call handsome men. You would not pick them out in a crowd because of their beauty of form or figure; but they were men of character, each one of them. They have wielded an influence upon the lives of the people of this Church during the periods of their leadership. They were men of purity, cleanliness, devotion, faithfulness, and determination, men who resisted the pitfalls and snares of the adversary. Their predecessors were also men of character—men who walked and talked with the Lord, as it were.

We cannot normally look upon the face of the Savior in our present mortal condition, but we can recognize great and good men whose lives we would like to imitate. A chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court said of one who influenced his university career, "I admired him for his learning, loved him for his goodness, profited greatly from both. He believed that scholastic attainments were better than riches, but that better than either were faith,

love, charity, clean living, clean thinking, loyalty, tolerance, and all other attributes that combine to constitute that most precious of all possessions—good character."

In thinking of these men whom I have known so well and who have passed to the great beyond—excepting President Kimball, who is still with us—I think of how the purpose of religion has been exemplified in their lives. Then I think of our greatest exemplar, our Redeemer and Savior.

The Church is a great character-building organization. The purpose of its various organizations is to teach those principles and doctrines which, if lived, will lead us on the path of righteousness to a happy mortal life and an eternity of joy in the life to come. We should remember always that we are sons and daughters of God, that we have in us a spark of divinity. We will be tempted and will sometimes succumb to temptations; we will make mistakes; but we must get up again and fight for the right. Jesus promised his apostles at the Passover: "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). When Isaiah was urging the backsliding Israelites not to forsake or forget what they had learned of God's law, he said, "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:21).

What do you think you are? John said, "Beloved, now are we sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

President George Albert Smith was a man of love, a man without guile. He stated that as a young boy, when he was attending the Brigham Young Academy in Provo, he heard the principal of the school, Karl G. Maeser, make a statement to the effect that not only

will we be required to give an accounting for our deeds done in the flesh, but for our very thoughts. This gave him some concern because he realized that sometimes his thoughts were not entirely what they should be. However, in thinking of the matter in depth, the thought came to him, "Of course we must give an accounting for our thoughts, because our thoughts lead to actions." In other words, "As [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). I think these thoughts that came to President Smith at that time influenced his entire life; and he conducted his actions in accordance with his thoughts, which thoughts were clean and pure. His life was devoted to helping his fellowmen.

In this connection I like the statement by President McKay wherein he said: "Entertain upbuilding thoughts. What you think about when you don't have to think shows what you really are." President Brown has reminded us that each one of us must live with himself throughout eternity, and each one of us is now working on the kind of man he must live with throughout eternity. (And in speaking of man, we also mean his counterpart, woman.) Man is God's greatest creation. He has unlimited potentiality. He is God's son. He is an eternal entity made in the image of his Heavenly Father, the Father of his spirit. He lived in a spiritual state before he came here, undoubtedly in the presence of his Father. He knew his Father very well. His Heavenly Father loved him.

God loved us, his spirit children, so greatly that he provided a plan whereby we might become more like unto him, and he gave his beloved Son, one who stood high in the councils of heaven, higher than any other of his children. It was necessary, in order to bless his other children—you and me and all his children—with the necessary opportunities for progression, that there be a great atoning sacrifice, which sacrifice involved our redemption from sin in order that our earthly experience

might be fulfilled and that it might be made possible for us to continue on into a further state, eventually resurrection from the dead and eternal life in the presence of our Heavenly Father. Our Savior, our beloved Brother, has said that this is life eternal, that we might know the only true God and his beloved Son, Jesus Christ (John 17:3). He has made it possible for us in our school of learning and preparation that we might return into the presence of our Heavenly Father.

To know God, however, is more than to know the nature of God, great as that knowledge is. To truly know him, we must love him and we must keep the commandments that he has given us. We can therefore, in a sense, understand why the Savior, in answer to the question as to what is the greatest of commandments, should say,

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. [Matthew 22:37–39]

The love of God is to us incomprehensible. The fact that he would make provision that his beloved son should die for us in an ignoble manner indicates a far greater love than meets our understanding. Shakespeare glimpsed somewhat the nature of man when he said: "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action, how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a god!" (*Hamlet*, act 2, scene 2). God is indeed mindful of man, and the Son of Man, and man should never fail in his mindfulness of God and his determination to serve him and keep his commandments.

I reiterate, we are children of God. We must keep in communication with him to receive of his power, inspiration, and guidance. The scriptures say of Jesus: "In him was life"—

eternal life (see John 1:4). Yes, in him is hope, eternal hope. In him is understanding and physical as well as spiritual strength. In him we will develop character such as will help us to become more like unto him. In him and his

teachings we may attain eternal life, which is the true purpose of our existence.

May the Lord help each of us to realize who we are, and help us in our determination to be successful in fulfilling life's purposes, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.