

This Is Life Eternal

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My dear brothers and sisters, I appreciate very much being with you today. I am aware of the great tradition of devotionals at this great university, and I hope that what I feel impressed to say will be an experience of learning for all of us.

The other day I was approached after a stake conference by a young man who explained to me that he had been a member since he was a child, that he had kept all the commandments insofar as he knew, and that he had even fulfilled a mission in the cause of building the kingdom. He told me that he had a testimony of the Book of Mormon and of the various prophets of the restored Church, but his greatest desire—the desire to really know God the Father and the Savior in the way that John (John 17:3) described as life eternal—he had never achieved.

As I looked at him, I felt the spirit of a righteous, truth-seeking, honest man. Because it was not the right place to speak about this at any length, I just told him, “Keep living as you are doing, and the time will come when your eyes will be opened, and you will be able to testify in deep humility, ‘I thank thee, my Redeemer, that thou has revealed thyself unto me.’”

Importance of Knowing God

Let me talk to you today about this subject because if we have not really experienced him, if we have not received that joyful, redeeming experience of knowing him, our entire life will be a big misunderstanding with a dreadful awakening at the end.

My dear brothers and sisters, there are many different dimensions of a testimony of the truth of God that we as his children can have. There can be the testimony of fear in the burden of one’s sins; the testimony of hope ye filled with doubts and painful questions; the testimony through the heritage of our parents; the testimony of details—like programs or scriptures; and the testimony of principles such as obedience, chastity, or others. All of this is just a beginning—maybe a marvelous beginning to walk in the small and narrow path that leads to salvation—but it is a beginning with a strong invitation to continue to search, to

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continue to strive, to continue to learn; and in so doing, we shall receive what Paul wished the Ephesians to receive, according to his letter to them:

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.
[Ephesians 1:15–17]

Knowing our Heavenly Father and him whom he has sent, Jesus Christ, goes hand in hand with learning to love them, and, in so doing, fulfilling the first commandment that he has given his children. Jesus told us clearly what that commandment is:

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, 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.
[Matthew 22:35–38]

Loving him with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind means knowing him, and this is the key for understanding his plan of salvation and obeying all his commandments, as we read in 1 John 2:3–4:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

How can we love someone whom we do not know? The whole purpose of life and

all the questions of salvation rest upon the requirement that we learn to know him. This is the greatest blessing for a human being! It is the ultimate purpose of our mortal life—to find him and to feel the joy and the warmth of his acceptance and the power of his light and his voice. When God asks us to love him, then we must know that he loves each one of us and that he is reaching out to each of us, that he might touch us, that we will not lose ourselves in the matters of the flesh and in the vain desires of this world.

Free Agency

Being a child of God means being an individual possessed with the dignity of free agency. We can, through our daily actions and decisions, attain those characteristics that will help us overcome the vain desires of this world—that triumph that leads to growing joy and satisfaction and success in all that we strive to achieve! But our free agency can also provide us with a growing lack of awareness, and we can find ourselves involved with false causes and our spirits filled with grief and false ambitions with the consequence of declining light and a life of suffering and maybe even sarcasm, filled with fear.

Spiritual Experiences

Oh, how much our Heavenly Father loves us—to reach out to every one of his children with his concern, doing it in his way, touching our lives with all kinds of spiritual experiences but without taking away our free agency.

I am always amazed when I talk with non-members about their spiritual experiences. I have learned that nearly everyone, when he takes the time to look within his own life, will admit that he has had this kind of sacred experience too. In the course of my life the spiritual experiences that I have had became for me the instigators and the forces driving me to search out the higher meaning of life, and they helped

me finally to find, accept, and rejoice in his kingdom and his Church.

The Savior's Sacrifice

When our Heavenly Father sent us down to this earth's testing ground to work out our destiny he did not leave us here alone. First and foremost, there was the shedding of the innocent blood of our Father's Only Begotten Son, Jesus the Christ, in the atoning sacrifice, that all men might receive the key to their own resurrection and to eternal life. Through Christ's victory over death, justice is fulfilled. Men will not suffer from Adam's transgression as we read in 1 Corinthians 15:22:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Through the atoning sacrifice of our savior, we assume the responsibility for the consequences of our actions. Paul made this very clear in his writings to the Galatians:

Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. [Galatians 6:7–8]

Teaching of the Prophets

Our loving Heavenly Father has given us powerful, mighty instruments through which we will not be without direction. Holy men, foreordained before the world was even created—special witnesses of the divine plan of salvation, were raised up in all dispensations of human history to stand as glorious pillars of light in the thick darkness of the world's realities. The testimonies of these men are recorded in the sacred books, gathered with the purpose that their testimonies will speak as “out of the dust,” a voice of warning to all who will heed them. These holy men who are called “the

prophets of old,” together with the living prophets in these latter days, cry out to the world—to the children of our Heavenly Father—as did Alma:

For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.

And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. [Alma 34:32–33]

It is within our free agency whether we leave this testimony untouched or whether we learn to follow the promptings of the aching spirit within us to reach out and to search to find the answers for the striving, basic questions of life: Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? Where will I go when I die?

Prayer

In his love and desire for us, God has not only given us the prophets who testify of him he has given us perhaps the greatest of all his gifts—the gift of direct communication with him. I am always amazed when I stand looking up on a clear night, gazing into the firmament above. As I try to comprehend the billions of systems of stars and the distances involved, I become aware that he, the Father of all, allows me in my loneliness and with my many questions, to communicate directly with him.

As human beings we feel it is an honor to be accepted in a private audience with a worldly authority—the mayor of a city, the governor of a state, or the president of a nation. How honored we would feel! How we would prepare for, look forward to, and appreciate such an opportunity! Still, we would have only experienced a meeting with another mortal

being. But, what an experience to be allowed—to be invited—to communicate with the Highest Majesty of all, the Creator of the whole universe! My heart is deeply touched when I read from the sacred record the words of the Savior:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? [Matthew 7:7–11]

What a comfort and a delight that you and I are not too insignificant, not too far away, not even too unclean to be welcomed anytime by him! What a blessing and a comfort to know that each and every one of us as his child has the right and the responsibility to discover and develop the ability to communicate with our Father. In so doing, we receive divine heavenly powers—like faith, moral strength, and the power to recognize truth and to understand the plan of salvation—and, as the ultimate goal, eternal life, as we learn to know him, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

Oh, my brothers and sisters, in this life the answer to all our questions, all our wounds and sorrows, lies in finding him. We in our mortal bodies bear the responsibility to learn that the many prayers offered by so many of his children do not necessarily mean that communication has taken place. Prayers can be offered out of habit or tradition, or they can be monologues without real intent of heart. Such prayers can even be harmful, as we read in the scriptures from the Book of Mormon:

And likewise also it is counted evil unto a man, if he shall pray and not with real intent of heart; yea, and it profiteth him nothing, for God receiveth none such. [Moroni 7:9]

Chastening

What can our loving Heavenly Father do to reach us when we do not listen, or when we have made for ourselves in our blindness false gods, or when we rebel and ignore his existence? He shows us his love in his own peculiar ways, as it is testified to by his witnesses in the scriptures:

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. . . .

But if ye be without chastening, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. [Hebrews 12:5–6, 8]

And also from the New Testament we read:

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. [Revelation 3:19]

And in modern revelation to his servant Joseph Smith the Lord said:

Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you whom I love, and whom I love I also chasten that their sins may be forgiven, for with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance in all things out of temptations, and I have loved you—

Wherefore, ye must needs be chastened and stand rebuked before my face. [D&C 95:1–2]

The bad times in our lives—when we experience illness, when we lose opportunities, have misfortunes and unexpected disasters; when we are filled with unhappy feelings of

emptiness and guilt—any of these can become the turning point in our lives, for these experiences can destroy the results of our personal pride. They can become the catalysts to help us become meek and lowly in heart, for only the meek and lowly in heart are fulfilling the prerequisites to be accepted in the presence of God.

None is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart. [Moroni 7:4]

Many people seem not to be able to learn to reach out to the Father, and they do not look for help from the Savior to find the Father until they find themselves humbled and chastised and brought down to the torment of despair.

Oh, my brothers and sisters, let us reach out and understand that God in his love for us will not touch us and take away from us the dignity of every individual—our free agency; but he can, in his great wisdom and love, chastise us to bitterness and smite us down unless we come to him and clean and wash ourselves through repentance to become ready for his presence.

Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth and by my wrath and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not. [D&C 19:15]

Decision to Know God

Let us make a decision that we will not stand in the twilight of a vague testimony or one more of hope than knowledge, or even one more of fear than hope. Let us make the decision that we will learn to overcome the world and learn to know him in this life—the time when men should prepare themselves to stand before him.

At this moment let me ask you to accept an invitation to approach your Father in Heaven

in your minds and to humble and expose yourselves in his presence.

Weaknesses Revealed

What will happen as we open ourselves to him in the spirit of prayer? God in his love desires to touch us and to help us. He will quietly and quickly expose to us our own weaknesses:

And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. [Ether 12:27]

The small, piercing voice in reaching us pierces like a sword in our souls. It is recorded in Hebrews 4:12:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Some Run Away

At this point we, as his children being exposed to the small and silent voice telling us of our weaknesses, make the decision of choosing life or death. Our Heavenly Father knows that only our weaknesses are separating us from him. He cannot take away our weaknesses, but he can point them out with a loving but piercing voice. Here, at this point, we become the masters of our destinies. Millions and millions of human beings live their lives according to their own plans and desires, and they do not know what they do. They run away from this loving influence. They don't like to hear it! They are afraid of the truth! They even fear the silence of an experience in serenity and peace.

It is men's desire to run away from the piercing, uncomfortable voice of truth and to escape into the world of entertainment and superficial actions that accounts for the great success of the amusement industry in our times.

Some Make Excuses

Another group of Heavenly Father's children recognize this piercing but silent voice but cannot stand the reality of the truth. They begin to rationalize and make all kinds of excuses. They learn to dwell on the mistakes of others and to create their own gods according to their own images. They are the fathers of hypocrisy and the authors of the thousands of man-made churches, religions, and philosophies. In 2 Timothy 4:3–4 it is recorded:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

Some Accept

When we are not aware of the significance of this situation, we can easily find ourselves either in the group that cannot stand the voice and are running away, or we have to live the hard life of always finding excuses and dwelling on the mistakes and weaknesses of others, that our own weaknesses will not be so burdensome, and then salvation and eternal life cannot become a part of us. In our reaction to our Heavenly Father's small voice to us, there can be only the spirit of grateful, humble acceptance—the reaction of, "Yes, Father. I know. Oh, forgive me! Help me! Strengthen me! With thy help I will make it. I will overcome! I thank thee for thy teaching. Show me my role of service and my way of repentance that I may become clean and worthy to receive the mercy of the atoning blood of the Savior,

that with all that I can do, he will finally wash me clean, that I will find salvation through him! Oh, Father, accept me in my desire to make a covenant with thee, even a covenant of baptism for the remission of sins by one of thine anointed, and let me renew my covenant through the ordinance of the sacrament. Oh, Father, give me the courage to become honest with myself, with thee, and with my neighbor, that I will be teachable and that I will learn to listen!"

Powerful Reward

Oh, dear brothers and sisters, when we react in this spirit to his desire to teach us with his small and silent voice, we will rejoice in receiving the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost that testifies and leads to the burning fire of the knowledge of God. The fulfillment of the communication between his children and God—the constant learning and listening, accepting, following, obeying—fills our souls with wisdom and knowledge, with strength and power, with the revelation for the needs of our day and the rejoicing in the joy of being touched by the spirit. This is the power that leads to the willing service in his sacred cause. There will be burning the growing desire to be allowed to become his disciple, to be allowed to pay back, to be allowed to obey his commandments and even to ask for more. For having known him means striving constantly for a more full understanding of our unworthiness, making our repentance more full, that his Spirit can dwell more in us and lead us to unknown dimensions of our personality where there is nothing too high, nothing too far, nothing too hard to reach out for. This is the stage where we finally feel the rewarding feeling of victory as we will be filled with love, with the love of Christ as the greatest gift of all. As we are filled with that power, our hearts will burst with love for our Heavenly Father and with love for our fellowmen, and this love will lead us to overcome all fear.

Testimony

I want to bear you my testimony that I have learned in my life of this love our Heavenly Father has for each of his children on this earth. Let us learn to listen and even to become perfect in our strivings to listen to what he, in his wisdom and power, wants to communicate to us. We will be able to do this only when we fulfill the prerequisite of true discipleship as mentioned in Luke 14:33.

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

Let us learn to communicate with Heavenly Father that we will learn to fulfill this prerequisite; that we will question ourselves, our

earthly belongings, our habits and attitudes and favored ideas, even our health and our desires; and place it all in his hands. He will lift us and touch us and lead us.

I bear you my testimony that I know without any doubt that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior, the Messiah, that he will come to hold judgment and to renew this world for the fulfillment and the rejoicing of the hope and the desires of all the righteous in heart. He is the Savior. He is the head of this Church that has been restored as a consequence of a humble, sincere communication of a righteous young boy with our Father in Heaven. This I testify to you in all sincerity in the love of Christ and in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.