The Tree of Life

We have seen recently in the news, several members of the church demanding to have their names removed from the records of the church due some principle of the gospel that they do not see eye-to-eye with. We see that there are many complicated principles that the gospel teaches that we do not fully understand. Women and the priesthood, gays marriages, and many others. Satan makes it very easy for us to loose site to that which is most important in this life. But sometimes, before we study the gospel to find answers to these complicated questions, we are quick to anger and confusion, which clouds our judgement.

In the first book of the Book of Mormon, we find the prophet Lehi in the wilderness with his family. Lehi, has a vision where he finds himself in “a dark and dreary waste”, alone and in the dark. After hours of being alone, he prayed for guidance. There he saw the Tree of Life. “I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit of thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen”. As Lehi partook of the fruit he said, “And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit”.

Moments later, Lehi saw his family standing near a river and he called for them to come try this delicious fruit. As a father, when you find something that is good, you immediately want to share it with your family. Lehi beheld a rod of iron alongside this river, that ended to the Tree of Life. His family grabbed the iron rod, and were led to the Tree of Life where they partook of the fruit. Lehi noticed that two of his sons did not join them. Lamen and Lemuel. They would not join the family. Imagine what Lehi must have felt knowing that his sons would not come unto him.

Later Lehi saw numberless concourses of people, trekking through this wasteland, holding onto the iron rod. However, there “arose a mist of darkness” which blinded people from the path. They let go, and were lost into forbidden paths. Eventually, those people made it to this great and spacious building floating in the sky. The people there would laugh, mock and scorn those that had partaken of the fruit. Some people were so ashamed, that they left the fruit, and were lost to those forbidden paths.

We learn what these objects are later when Nephi, Lehi’s son, has the same vision. The iron rod is the word of God. Scriptures. The fruit is the representation of the love of God. Or in other words, you could say the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The great and spacious building is the world, with people who are lost.

Now why would this vision be among the first chapters in the Book of Mormon? I find it very interesting that this vision is found in the 8th chapter of the Book of Mormon. As we read Lehi’s vision, we learn that his vision was meant for the members of the church, not to the rest of the world. This vision is direct counsel to the members of the church.

The great and spacious building is such and interesting part of this vision. It is high in the sky, a house for those who have left the church because they were ashamed, or because they were lost along the way. A place where everybody could gather and mock those that had partaken of the fruit. We even learn that this building is the pride of the world. What is interesting about this great building, is that it’s hovering in the sky, with no foundation holding them up. The building is destined to fall, along with their pride. In the gospel of Jesus Christ, we learn that Christ is our foundation, a foundation upon which we build cannot fall.

So what does this mean for the members of the church? What can we take away from this vision? We learn that the fruit of the tree is the love of God. The love of God is Jesus Christ and His Atonement. Our souls are filled with great joy when we are forgiven of our sins. Isn’t that what everybody wants? To feel the great relief of our sins and guilt lifted from our shoulders? I think that’s a feeling that even people outside of the church would like to feel. How many of you have felt that great feeling of relief when you eventually apologized to someone for something awful that you did?

I remember one night I had to run to my brothers house for something. It was very late at night, and he was the only person awake. I ran over there and he helped me with something. I opened my door, to grab something when I knocked the E-brake out of place. The car started to roll with the door open, until it caught on my brothers car and started to pull my car door backwards. Luckily, I was able to stop it before any damage was done to either car. Nothing happened to my brothers car, but my door bent a little. Nothing too noticeable if you didn’t look specifically at the door. But if you looked at it, you would see the door bent outward along the door handle. I didn’t want to tell my wife because it was her car. So I casually went back home, parked the car and didn’t speak a word of it. In fact, I thought that maybe if I didn’t say anything and she didn’t notice that I would be in the clear. This haunted me for days, because I tell my wife everything. Knowing that there was something bad that I did to her car would kill me. I knew that I wouldn’t hear the end of it. I went on for a couple of days until one day when we were walking to the, I pointed it out to her and she noticed it. At first she wasn’t thrilled about it, but then realized that it wasn’t a big deal and was grateful that it wasn’t a bigger problem. I felt so relieved when I told her. That burden was lifted off my shoulders. I could finally stop thinking about that mistake. That is a poor example of it’s like to be forgiven of sins. However, as it lifted my spirits, the fruit of the tree lifted one’s soul in joy.

The Lord Jesus Christ laid down His life, in order for us to be forgiven of our sins. Through that great sacrifice, we can be forgiven of any sin that we have committed. The Atonement is there to purify us, and to cleanse us in order to return back to our Heavenly Father. In order to return back to Heavenly Father, there are certain guidelines and commandments in place for us that we must abide by, in order to make it back to heaven. One of these requirements is to repent of our sins. The other is to obey His commandments.

There are commandments that we don’t understand. For some it is easier to live one commandment, where that same commandment is the most difficult thing to do for another individual. Regardless of commandment or principle, we must do what Lehi did, and that is hold to the iron rod. As we hold to the iron rod, in other words, if we study the scriptures everyday, we will be able to pass through these mist darkness’ along our path. We will be able to shut out the mockings of those around us. We will be able to focus our lives on our Lord. I realize that some principles might not make sense. And that can hurt us, and make us question our belief. But as Elder Holland once said, “Doubt your doubts, before you doubt your faith”.

I know that as we read the scriptures and pray everyday to Heavenly Father, that we will not be lost to these paths. I know that we will gain greater understanding and light, and we will be able to partake of that fruit and fill the joy that comes from it. I know that Jesus Christ laid His life down for us. So that we can overcome death and return to our loving Heavenly Father. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.