

Talk given August 15th, 2010

Adversity

In the Gospel reference, “True to the Faith,” it clearly teaches about what adversity is. It says the following,

“As part of Heavenly Father’s plan of redemption, you experience adversity during mortality. Trials, disappointments, sadness, sickness, and heartache are a difficult part of life, but they can lead to spiritual growth, refinement, and progress as you turn to the Lord.”

Many people wonder why adversity is present in each person’s life, and especially in each good person’s life. People will say, “Why is this happening to me, why me of all people?” The truth of the matter is, we grow through adversity. That is what adversity is there for. Hosea 5:15 reads, “I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.” In that scripture it is speaking of pride. When everything is going wonderfully in life, at times we forget the simple things like getting down on our knees in prayer each morning. The Lord knows that with adversity we will turn to him.

I look into my life, and see the infinite number of trials, challenges, and adversities that I have had to deal with. Then I think about how thankful I am for them. When I look back, I can see the Lord’s hand in my life in when I did not know it was present. When I look back I can see how much one simple trial had changed me, and helped me grow closer to my Savior. Now anytime I have a challenge, I might be a little nervous or scared, but I know that the Lord has a plan for me...and that this is going to be a good thing. In Doctrine and Covenants 122 Joseph Smith is being held at liberty jail and to say the least, he isn’t feeling very well. He is wondering why this is happening to him, when the church needs him so much. The Lord answers and says in verses 7-9,

“And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?

Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever.”

The Lord knows how we feel, and He knows that adversity is extremely difficult for us. But if we could manage to hold in our hearts and minds the real purpose of adversity...we would shout for joy when confronted by it. Adversity helps us grow closer to God, to become more like Christ. Adversity humbles

us when necessary so we turn to God and acknowledge his supremacy. If we could always remember that, when faced with it would have our heads held high knowing that what is coming could be difficult, but in no ways impossible, and in every way a wonderful opportunity.

True to the Faith continues teaching about adversity, and says the following,

“Adversity comes from different sources. You may at times face trials as a consequence of your own pride and disobedience. These trials can be avoided through righteous living. Other trials are simply a natural part of life and may come at times when you are living righteously. For example, you may experience trials in times of sickness and uncertainty or at the deaths of loved ones. Adversity may sometimes come because of others’ poor choices and hurtful words and actions.”

I would like to magnify the first mentioned source of trials, facing trials as a consequence of your own pride and disobedience. In our life, we have agency. As we make decisions in everyday life, we are forced to choose between the powers of Heaven powers of Hell. If at one point in life, you choose to follow Satan...even for just a moment, a lot can happen. First of all, a tiny bit of your agency is taken from you. As you continue to be disobedient to God you will slowly draw further from him into the captivity of Hell. As this happens, your agency is becoming more and more limited. Addictions may arise, guilt will be present, hate, and remorse may be prominent emotions, and with all of this, your ability to choose for yourself happiness and God is much more limited than you ever thought it could be. 2 Nephi 26:22 reads,

“And there are also secret combinations, even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil, for he is the founder of all these things; yea, the founder of murder, and works of darkness; yea, and he leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.”

This scripture clearly depicts the principle I was just teaching. We don’t see it happen automatically, but think about your personal life...are there little things in it that are on the road to bigger things? Matthew 6:24 reads, “No man can serve two masters for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” Likewise, all things in life are either evidence of God, and prove that He is, or are evidence of Satan and his endless hate for all of us here on earth. There is no middle ground.

In my life, I think of the simplest things that could represent that gentle and imperceptible flaxen cord. I think about music. Are there songs that are contrary to the standards of God? Am I in a position to feel the Spirit when I listen to any of the songs on my iPod? I will think about other media, such as movies, or video games. If there is anything in them contrary to the commandments of God, I should just get rid of them. Because as I let that evil spirit in...in will slowly work on me like rusting metal and I will ever so slowly distance myself from God, grow closer to Satan, lose my agency, and become miserable. Boyd K. Packer taught the following,

“The Apostle Paul said: ‘If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.’ If our view is limited to mortal life, some things become unbearable because they seem so unfair and so

permanent. There are doctrines which, if understood, will bring a perspective toward and a composure regarding problems which otherwise have no satisfactory explanations.”

I thought a lot into this teaching and thinking about how significant the doctrines of the Gospel are when facing adversity. The most simple, is just knowing that this life is but a tiny thread in the grand tapestry of eternity. If we can hold an Eternal perspective in our everyday life, then we will see things for what they really are. With an Eternal perspective it would be easy to throw away vulgar or offensive media. It would be easy to serve others, to go out with the missionaries, to pay tithing, to keep the word of wisdom and the law of chastity. If we could keep the image of our Savior Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father, waiting for us to come home where we will live together for all of Eternity then every challenge that we face will make sense and will be not only possible, but positive and enjoyable. This is what is meant by an eye of faith, or our spiritual eyes.

True to the Faith touches on this principle, it says the following,

“When you trust in the Father and the Son, you are confident that They love you perfectly – that They want you to be happy and that They will help you grow spiritually. You keep the commandments. You seek to know Their will, and you do what They require even when you desire something else. Your prayers for relief are accompanied by the understanding that Heavenly Father will not resolve all matters immediately – that He may allow you to wait so you can continue to learn and grow. Through it all, you find comfort in the assurance that the Savior understands your trials perfectly. As part of His infinite Atonement, He took upon Himself ‘the pains and the sicknesses of his people.’ He took upon Himself ‘their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.’ Because He has experienced your pain, He knows how to help you. If you look to Him in faith, He will strengthen you to withstand any trial you experience.”

In times of trial and tribulation, remember what Joseph Smith said in Doctrine and Covenants 58:2-4, “He that is faithful in tribulation, the reward of the same is greater in the kingdom of heaven. Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation. For after much tribulation come the blessings.”

It is interesting because God knows we will have challenges, He permits them knowing that they will bring us to Him if we let it. Jesus Christ suffered for those pains for us to grow closer to Him. These challenges are for our benefit. But many times in life we see people that are absolutely miserable because they have let the trials in their lives give them the excuse to be depressed, or to give up all together. But at the same time as all of these challenges...Man is that he might have joy. The Lord knows that we can experience joy while in the midst of trial and affliction, but that is up to us. Mosiah 7:33 reads, “But if ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind, if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage.”

This scripture could relate to the repentance process, or the strength to resist temptation, or it could

even relate to just happiness and sadness. If we will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, put our trust in him, serve him with all diligence of mind...He will be there for us. He will deliver us out of bondage, strengthen us, and uphold us by our righteousness. D&C 38:1-2 reads,

“Thus saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, the Great I AM, Alpha and Omega...The same which knoweth all things, for all things are present before mine eyes.”

All things were present before His eyes when he, through his prophet said, man is that he might have joy. Finding joy in adversity can definitely be extremely difficult, but it is possible, and the closer we grow to God...the more natural it becomes.

Sometimes I like to think of my trials and challenges of life in a unique light. To explain this, I will use a short story.

There was a teenage girl. She comes home one day from school, and her mother is just sitting on the floor leaning against the wall. Now usually her mother is always in motion, always doing something...so this really caught the daughter off guard. She walks up to her dazed-eyed mother and hesitantly said, “Mom....” Nothing happened. So she stood there for a moment just wondering what is going on, and finally asks, “Mom...what’s wrong?” After a moment, the mother said, “Nothing.” Now the teenage girl is really confused. I can just picture what is going through her head, “What the heck are you doing on the floor then if...nothing is wrong?!” After another moment of thought the daughter asked, “Well what do you mean nothing is wrong?” And the mother said, “That is exactly the problem...nothing is wrong. Everything went perfectly smoothly today. Nothing even slightly bad happened, no one said anything to annoy me...absolutely nothing is wrong, that’s the problem.” The daughter’s brain is going a hundred miles an hour...still wondering what the heck is wrong with that. She just waits for a moment for her mother to explain herself further. Finally the mom gave the answer to her daughter’s internal question, “If absolutely nothing bad happened to me, and nothing bad is going on still...then Satan thinks I am in his back pocket and he doesn’t have to work on me.”

So now in my life I think very frequently in a context similar to that. If there is a trial ... that is the hardest thing I can possibly imagine, then I think, “Alright, I must be doing something good because Satan wants me to fall more than usual.” With that train of thought, I dive into the scriptures head first, I pray fervently and I follow the instruction in Mosiah 7:33. Then I can feel the Lord strengthening me...I can actually feel it. I become impenetrable because of the strength of the Lord, and I know that nothing can get to me. So with a difficult challenge...I grow so much. At times that growth will leave me with pride, and I won’t study or pray as much as I need to, so I need to be humbled again. It seems like an endless cycle sometimes. But when I do stick to what I know, when I find a way to balance the many things in life in such a way where scripture study is an essential part of my day...I just constantly grow closer to God. I imagine this is how it will be until I am perfect like Christ, which is a ways down the road...but I’m on the road headed in the right direction.

In the Book of Mormon, there is an account of a people in bondage that are suffering under a cruel ruler. They lifted their hearts and voices to God, asking for help, and He replied,

“Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.

And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.” That is found in Mosiah 24:13, 14, and 25.

The people then had faith in the words of the Lord and the power of the Lord and their burdens were made light. In our lives today we can be like these people and submit cheerfully with patience to all the will of the Lord. We can have faith in His plan for us even though it is unclear at times, and with Him helping us we can go through the stormy days in life with joy, then reap the blessings of the sunny days in His presence for all of eternity.

It is an interesting thing, because adversity is defined by the world as, “A state of hardship or affliction; a misfortune.” I agree that adversity can definitely be a hardship and afflictions as well. But a misfortune...that is an interesting thought. The majority of people on the planet would see adversity as a misfortune. However, if you are in tune with the Spirit and are living in accordance to our Heavenly Father’s will...you will not see adversity as a misfortune. When keeping your life in accordance with the way our Heavenly Father would have you live, when keeping an eye fixed on the glory of God, and seeing this life for what it really is: a large step taken in a short amount of time to become like our Savior, and like our Heavenly Father, then adversity will not be a misfortune at all. We will realize that adversity required for growth in this life. Really...we didn’t even have to come to Earth. Heavenly Father is perfectly omniscient and He knows the decisions we would have made, He knows us better than anything we can imagine, and He knows all things past, present and future. Yet...we are here on this Earth. It is a gift from our Heavenly Father that we are here to learn for ourselves. Adversities...which the world defines as misfortunes are not misfortunes at all. According to the world, misfortunes are defined as bad luck.

I firmly believe that our adversities have nothing to do with any sort of luck, but all things have their specific purpose in each of our lives. Of course we will go through difficult and treacherous times, we knew we would before this life and I like to think that we shouted for joy. Picture it, the Lord gives us an opportunity to become more like Him...yet we know it will be difficult, and it will test our faith and our abilities to be obedient to His loving voice. But we could see clearly, we had learned Eternal truths that were in the forefronts of our minds, and with that clear Eternal perspective, it was apparent what we should do. We chose to follow our Father in Heaven...now we are here on the Earth to prove to Him that without His physical presence in our view, we can rely on Him purely by faith...until our faith is perfected and we know.

Adversity is difficult, hard, at times it may seem utterly impossible...but I know in my life, my greatest joys have come from overcoming adversity. My greatest joys have come from that feeling of growing closer to my Savior, becoming more like Him each day...even though I may be struggling through many situations in life. I know that I am far from perfect, which is where the atonement comes in. Doctrine and Covenants 19:16-19 proclaims,

"I, God, have suffered these things for all, they might not suffer if they would repent;
But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;

Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit – and would bat I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink –

Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men."

Jesus Christ loves us, which is why He suffered for us. I picture Him in the Garden of Gethsemane with the weight of every feeling of sorrow, affliction, every trial, temptation...everything, and then I picture Him seeing me, thinking of me while He is suffering. Saying, "Nathan, my little brother, I love you and I want to be with you for Eternity." I too love Him, and I am astounded by His ability to help me, and my Heavenly Father's ability to forgive me. I always want to be better, knowing that each time I make a mistake...I am hurting my Savior so much.

As life goes on, as each day continues, and as each trial approaches I think about the scripture in John chapter 14 verse 15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." I do love Him, but do I love Him enough to have it reflect in my actions of everyday life that may seem meaningless and harmless at the time? I also think about the scripture John 4:19 which says, "We love Him, because He first loved us."

It is true, if He didn't love me, if He hadn't suffered for me, if He wasn't always there for me, always helping me every step of the way...I probably wouldn't feel the need to love Him. But I do love Him, because He first loved me. And because I love Him...I need to push through every adversity life has to offer with a head held high focusing on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and His atonement.

One quick story before I close. At one point in my life several years ago I was faced with an option, an option which held extreme weight of the decision to be made. I knew that I had been struggling with it for some time, and I wanted to do better...but I couldn't. I didn't understand why I couldn't. I would read 1 Corinthians 10:13 which says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

I didn't understand how He could make that promise. I knew the scriptures were true, I knew the Gospel was true...and yet I found myself helpless. Then one night, I knelt by my bedside and humbly prayed the most sincere prayer I ever had. Saying, "Lord, I cannot do this on my own, I realize that I need thy help. I know that if I jump right now I will fall, but I need to. So please, help me fly. Help me overcome this, help me have faith as you already have faith in my abilities. I love thee, and thank thee for loving me." The prayer continued as I prayed, and tears streamed silently down my face in abundance. I then recognized...something had changed. Was it because I acknowledged the need of Divine help? Or simply that I had made the decision to be better? Or was it that I realized what I needed to do? I then understood that it was a combination. I needed the internal will from my very

heart to be in the right place, and I had to understand my need for the Savior in my life, and His help.

This Gospel is absolutely true; there is no doubt anywhere in my being. I love this Gospel, I love my Heavenly Father with all of my heart; I love this Gospel and know that it is true. I am incessantly astounded by His mercy and His love that is ever so prominent in my life. I know that the Plan of Salvation is real. I have prayed about it, wondering if I really would see my brothers and sisters again, and the Holy Ghost made that known to me as well. I know the Book of Mormon is true. Every day that I read it I feel the power of those words strengthening my ability to be obedient and triumphant, strengthening my faith in Jesus Christ, and strengthening my love for Him. I know that, “with the temptation, God will make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).” I know that adversities are for our experience, learning, and will be for our good (D&C 122:7). I humbly say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.