

Talk given on August 29th, 2010

Mortal Life Talk

“When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not thee o'erflow,
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless, . . .
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply.
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design . . .
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine. . . .

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, . . .
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!” – (How Firm a Foundation)

People everywhere are afraid, are scared, are in anguish, are more than sorrowful, and some people...every day for them is painful and dreadful. Why do they feel this? What it really comes down to, is this, they need their Savior in their life, they need knowledge of Him, and hope in Him.

In addition to this thought, of having the Savior in ones life...which what mean is living His commandments and being worthy for the blessings of the Holy Ghost and blessings of the temple, but in addition, Boyd K. Packer said,

“Whatever your age, if you follow the right plan, you will be all right. Come what may, wherever you go, whatever happens to the world, whatever trials you face, you need not fear the future. ‘If ye are prepared ye shall not fear.’ I assure you, you need not fear the future. You will be happy – if, that is, you follow ‘the great plan of happiness’” (Mine Errand from the Lord, p.5).

Well what does that mean? Following the great plan of happiness? I thought that the plan of happiness was just a sketch on a board with a bunch of shapes and long-worded labels. But actually, Alma teaches us a little about the Plan in Alma 42,

“Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness.

Therefore, as the soul could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal, that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord, it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death.

Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state.

And now remember, my son, if it were not for the plan of redemption, (laying it aside) as soon as they were dead their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord.

And now, there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience;

Therefore, according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state, yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God" (Alma 42:8-13).

He just taught that the Plan of Happiness can only be brought about on conditions of our repentance in this probationary state, or in mortal life. The Plan of Happiness is in effect, but we are the ones who decide if it will change our lives.

Now about this life where so many people struggle, and so many people are harrowed up by the weight of the world, Nephi teaches in 2 Nephi 2:25,

"Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy."

We are on the earth...to have joy. Why then, do so many people even in the church; who know about Jesus Christ, His commandments, and His true Gospel; live life being sad and depressed? A good friend of mine, who I talk with frequently is one of these people who is sad more than frequently. Just about every conversation I will ask, "how are you doing?" She will reply something to the effect of, "I'm ok, how are you?" I will ask why she is only ok. And she begins to expound on all of the stupid things that go on her life and how it stinks. All the while I am thinking...why?! Not, why do stupid things happen, but why do you let them bring you down?!

Satan has those stupid things in your life because he wants you to be depressed, he knows that if you are sad all the time...you are not a threat to him, you are like an archer on a tower without any arrows. In addition to that, why should she let those things get to her? She has a testimony of the Gospel, but apparently she lets those other things overrule the power of her testimony. Because sure, this individual may have a lot of bad things going on in life that are out of her power, but happiness is her choice, and she can choose to focus on the Eternal perspective.

Doctrine and Covenants 122:7 reads,

"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.”

Every single person who faces this mortal life while have trials and challenges, and I believe that people who are firm in their testimonies will receive even more difficult challenges because Satan doesn't want them to succeed. The Lord says that he will try his people, and He definitely does; through adversity.

I once heard of a family who was the happiest family you could imagine. Each of them just loved life, and a lot of people didn't fully understand why. Some people thought that it was because this family had no problems. Little did these people know; that years before three of the children in this family had passed away, and now the father of 9 children had a brain tumor which came as close as it gets to taking his life. This tumor was the catalyst for another 6 brain surgeries over the next several years. Mix those surgeries with cancer in various places in this man's body...and you have a man who can no longer work, a man who has seizures sporadically and randomly. This left the mother to go and support for the large family. They struggled to break even for sometime...and still, through all of this they were the happiest people you could possibly imagine.

I am thoroughly convinced that happiness is an internal decision and is unaffected and unchanged by any outward circumstances regardless of how severe. Why is this family so happy you may ask? The Gospel is ever so prominent in each of their lives; the Savior is in each of their hearts; and the Spirit of God Himself is in their home. The family knows that no matter what happens in this life...it will only be for a short time. Even if the tumor did take the father's life...it is not the end, because this family is sealed together in the House of God, by the infinite power of the Priesthood.

Happiness is not contingent on outward circumstances. Peace is found from within yourself submitting your will to your Heavenly Father's. In another circumstance, there was a man...boy was he rich. He had a home that was worth millions of dollars, he had a Ferrari, thousand-dollar suits, and he just enjoyed his rich life and the company he brought home each night. But deep inside this man, who appeared to have it all, was anguish and despair. This man couldn't stand life because he knew something didn't fit, he knew something was missing...and he never found out what.

We as children of God, and members of this church know the Plan of Salvation. We have been taught about the glorious atonement of Jesus Christ himself, and we have been baptized into the church bearing the name of our Savior Himself on our countenances. And yet so many of us go through each day grudgingly unhappy.

There was a time in my life where I was more than unhappy. Like the rich man mentioned a moment ago...no one knew I was unhappy, that I hated life and wanted it to end...because I had given up all together. I hated life because I knew that my life was definitely not in accordance with the Gospel, and a part of me knew the Gospel was true. With this sin engrained in my soul at the time....it ate at my entire being bit by bit, and I was depressed because of it. After some time of enduring this pain grudgingly, things started changed. I finally turned to the Lord and His atonement. Jump in the future a bit, and I was finally happy...infinitely happy, and nothing could bring me down except for my own rebellious actions if they were ever to return.

Happiness is contingent on our obedience, or testimonies, and our outlook on life. If we believe that this life is it....and you get your car totaled and be bankrupt, you would be pretty depressed. But if we embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, then we know that that does not matter at all; those kind of experiences are there to test our faith in Christ, and to bring us to Him, and in the most strenuous of tests...joy is still meant to be found. This does not mean that life will be easy, but it is still meant to be enjoyed.

If happiness is contingent on our obedience, then why do so many people of the church willingly and knowingly rebel against the very God who created them? It is my belief that it takes time for each individual to learn for themselves how to find happiness. Life is difficult and full of trials, but when I see trials approaching me in my life I try to look at it in a positive light.

When I see something terrible coming at me, I am proud...because I know that I have passed every part of this Mortal test that has been given me, and I am coming up on the next page. I am proud because Satan finds me of all people as some sort of a threat to his kingdom and his goals. I want to be the kind of person that when my feet hit the ground each morning, and I humbly kneel in prayer...Satan thinks, "Oh crap, he's up again." I want to be the kind of person where when I kneel in prayer each morning my Father in Heaven is proud to say, "That is my son down there."

Sure, life is difficult; any synonym to the word difficult would be an understatement when trying to describe this life. It is HARD! Of course it is hard. If it wasn't hard...what would be the point? One of my favorite feelings in life...is the feeling of overcoming something that was really difficult to do; that feeling of knowing that I did it with the Savior guiding me; the feeling of knowing that I grew closer to my Father in Heaven, because of this difficult thing in my life. Out of every trial and challenge in life, there is always a lesson to be learned.

Our Savior, Jesus Christ teaches the following in 3 Nephi 27,

"And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil –

And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works.

And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world."

Which part of our life will we choose to focus on? When bad things happen to us, will we think about how terrible life is, or will we think about the atonement of Jesus Christ that will always be there for us? The atonement will always be enough if we let it work miracles in our lives. So no matter happens

remember the Lord's promise to Joseph Smith,

"My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;

And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high;; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes"
(D&C 121:7-8).

No matter what it is that is going on in our lives, it will only be for a moment. We can do this! We are children of Heavenly Father, and Spiritually begotten children of Jesus Christ. We have divine potential to perfect like they are, and right now...we have the Holy Ghost to guide us, and their strength to uphold us if we come unto them with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Don't be sad! Life is wonderful, every day is a sunny day if you let it be. Every day is a wonderful day...if you let be, and every day can truly be a joy even while living in this terrible world, because happiness is not contingent on outward circumstances.

If you have lost hope and feel that you cannot feel joy, that you are so far gone that it is helpless to even try...think again. You're here, and that says something about your internal faith. And now think about these prophetic words spoken by Boyd K. Packer, an apostle of God,

"There is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. That is the promise of the atonement of Christ."

There is always hope if you have a seed of faith in the things that really matter in this life: our Savior, Jesus Christ, our loving Father in Heaven, The Book of Mormon, the Priesthood and the Plan of Salvation. Life was meant to be enjoyed, so dive head first into this gospel and start enjoying.

I once heard a story about this boy. He was going through life each day...so excited to get to middle school. He thought this, "I will be happy once I get to middle school...yea, that will be the day." He gets to middle school...now his thoughts are, "You know, I will really be happy when I graduate get to high school." He gets to high school, now, "I will really be happy when I can date." His sixteenth birthday rolls around and he says, "I will be really happy when I am done with high school and just find a wife at college."

Jump in the future a few years, he graduated from college, is married with kids and thinks, "I will really be happy when the kids are out of the house and I can retire." Pretty soon he is about 80 years old, and he is looking back on his life...and he sees a lot of missed opportunities, and a pretty empty life. He wished he could have gone back and found some way to find joy while going through all of this, because for some reason...he never really found the joy he was looking for.

This man's story is not a unique one. At times we say things similar to this, "I will be happy when..." whatever it may be. But that is not how it is supposed to be. We are meant to be happy now, to find joy in the journey. A man named Dan Millman said something I will never forget, "Be happy now, without reason...or never be happy at all."

I like this a lot because he clearly teaches that it is our choice. He also taught this, "Pain is a relatively objective, physical phenomenon; suffering is our psychological resistance to what happens. Events may create physical pain, but they do not in themselves create suffering. Resistance creates suffering. Stress happens when your mind resists what is...The only problem in your life is your mind's resistance to life as it unfolds."

This man was not even LDS. And yet he could see that our mind has the power to choose...that we have been given that gift. We have knowledge of the Plan of Salvation, the importance of this life, and the atonement of Jesus Christ that we can use in our life anytime we humble ourselves before our Savior. Life will bring its surprises, but it is ok. These surprises teach us who we are, and where we want to end up. This life was not meant to be a waste of time, it was meant to teach us about our Savior, to teach us how to learn according to faith, to help us become like our loving Heavenly Father. I know that this Gospel is true, I love it with every ounce of my being. I love my Heavenly Father, and His merciful willingness to always forgive me when I screw up. I love my Savior Christ who suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane thinking of me, Nathan Birch, and how his atonement would change my entire life, and save my soul from an everlasting hell. He suffered for each of us, I know that He did. I know that if submit our will to our Heavenly Father's and faithfully follow him...all will be well, and we will never regret the decision to follow Him. At times it may feel like our faith is but a small candle in a vast darkness...so helpless and insecure. But you will find as you exercise that faith, as you step into the unknown, trusting in your Heavenly Father for your support, you will grow infinitely, and life will change. You will come to know as I have that this life...is a joy, and this life is a gift from our Heavenly Father. "IF thou desirest this thing, if thou wilt bow down before God, yea, if thou wilt repent of ally thy sins, and will bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest" (Alma 22:16). Give up your pride and serve the Lord always, starting with baptism and confirmation, then enduring to the end. This is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.