

Easter

Talk Delivered at an LDS Sacrament Meeting

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...While I waited, I finished law school. I had a job in Provo where I worked with a fellow named Jay Wirig. He had served a mission in Hong Kong in the early 70s/late 60s, and while there, he had a lung collapse. He was taken to a doctor, the doctor diagnosed it, and he was sent to someone to take care of the collapsed lung. He arrived with his companion at the address he had been given, and it was up a couple flights of stairs (which may seem like no big deal unless you have a collapsed lung, and you're trying to get up two flights of stairs to see your treating physician). When he got to the fellow's door, it was this elderly, diminutive Chinese fellow with a fairly simple-looking office and no surgical equipment to speak of. He got out a stethoscope, and he listened all around, and then he pulled out a device (he said looks like a Phillips screwdriver, except on the end there were four razors), walked over, and punched a hole right in his chest with no warning—I mean, just stabbed him in the chest—and then took a tube and fed it in, hooked him up to a vacuum that, within a few minutes, took all the pain away, and he was breathing again. But he thought just how, if he'd been told beforehand what was coming, he'd have never gone to the office. He had seen, for all the world, the least likely of procedures to result in something healing and curative but fixed it.

When he got back from the mission, it turned out he had a propensity to a collapsed lung. And it was some years later (after he had gone through these intermediary steps that fixed it temporarily) that he finally said, "You need surgery." So, he went to the hospital, and he got surgery. And they had to open him up and they had to take out some lining that would make the lungs stick hard (and some of you are physicians and would know what that involves). But he was put on the same ward as the heart patients. The heart patients had had their chests opened up; he'd had his chest opened up. Heart patients were all elderly and infirm. He was young and vigorous—still in his 20s, at this point. But the heart patients they'd accessed through the solar plexus, so when they used a rib spreader, everything moved in a cooperative fashion. They came in through his side, and therefore, when they spread his ribs, they crushed all of the cartilage between all of the ribs. And here he is with these elderly heart patients, and they're eating and joking and carrying on, and he is in enormous pain, and no one prepared him for that or the taunting that he would get from these folks who say, "What's wrong with you kid? Can't you take it?"

Well, I use his stories—borrow them from him—to illustrate the problem of a physician's bedside manner. We've got enough doctors in here that I'm assuming... You know, we just... We had today another one of Gordon Kimball's handiwork crop up in Laramie over there. My father-in-law's here today visiting, and he's been through Gordon Kimball's shoulder reconstruction process.

When a physician (and I'm not talking about Gordon or any of you folks who are physicians in our ward), when a physician treats another party to heal them but has never been through the particular agony that they're about to inflict upon someone, there's always a gulf between the physician (as healer) and the person being healed.

When I was in law school, one of the things that I helped do was coauthor a text on family law, and it interested me. And therefore, when I finished law school, I wanted to practice family law, which literally means you're gonna get involved, primarily, in divorce—and I mean, there's adoption, there are other things—but primarily in divorce. I did divorce work for about three years before it got so wearying, so troubling, and so unpleasant that I stopped taking new cases. And it took me another three years to finish up all the cases I had pending. So, in six years that I had handled divorces, it was probably the most unpleasant... I mean, it was interesting for the first 18 months, then it began to drag, then it became unpleasant, then it became well nigh intolerable. And I used to joke that I'd been through hundreds of divorces.

Then... Then I actually went through a divorce. And when I went through a divorce, everything changed. I came to view that area of the law as completely inadequate for the problems that people come to the lawyer for. It should probably be ~~handled~~ handled by mental-health professions instead of lawyers. Because lawyers are interested in theories and interested in ideas and interested in legal principles and in gathering evidence and persuading and presenting instead of the actual human agony that visits someone anytime they're put through the ordeal of breaking up a family.

Well, I mention doctors and lawyers (because we have such an infestation in this ward) to illustrate the problem which Christ primarily sought to address. When I got asked to give this talk on Easter, I started thinking about it immediately. And as I'm wont to do, I kept my antenna up listening for the "arguments de jour" of disbelief. And I heard one argument of why there is no God several times in the popular media, and it went something like this: How can you believe there's a God when you are suffering from...? (And then, you name it.) In other words, if there is a God, then why hasn't He taken care of the pain that you're enduring? And I thought about that argument. In fact, it's because of that, that my mind went back to the bad bedside manner of doctors and the unfeeling nature of lawyers...and Christ.

See, when Joseph was in Liberty Jail, he suffered there for a month, and in the process of suffering, he... The... First, the nature of Joseph's suffering was significantly more troubling than our histories have allowed us to look into. We get this excerpt from the autobiography of Parley Pratt where Joseph is being railed at by the guards in prison until Joseph can take it no longer. And he rises, and he rebukes the guards, and he tells them to be silent, or he or they would die that instant. And the guards are so intimidated by what Joseph had said that, in quaking silence, they stopped their boasting. What **preceded** that in Parley's description was vile oaths and bragging about the suffering that had been visited upon the saints by Missouri mobs; they'd been driven out. And among other things, they had boasted about the people that had been killed, the property that had been destroyed, the women who had

been raped. And although there is a discrete treatment of the subject, Joseph's family was absolutely targeted by the Missouri mobs.

So, when Joseph records his prayer in section 121 (which is an excerpt from the letter he wrote):

O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?

And he goes on from there in his lamentation:

...Yea, O Lord, how long shall they suffer these wrongs and unlawful oppressions...?

And he asks why God's ear can't be penetrated by the cries of the saints. After his petition of the answer in verse 6 of section 121, there is a lengthy part of the letter before we get to what we find in verse 7; it's the last words before verse 7 picks up where he talks about how his mind is literally in a frenzy—as he sits in the jail—contemplating the wrongs of his people—Joseph's people, the Lord's people—and Joseph's own absolute powerlessness to do anything about it. And how his mind in this frenzy darts back and forth from one subject to another until at last he finally collapses. And when he can do nothing more but submit, then he writes: "Along comes the voice of inspiration and says..." (now we get verse 7):

...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 121:1-7)

See, in the words of both the hymns sung today, there's a reference to the healing power of the Savior and the Savior's wounds. When it comes to compassion and Christ, it moves from something which is passive (from something which is "understanding") into something that is affirmative, aggressive, and healing. It's not the **words** that were spoken to Joseph, because we could read them, and we could read them with some degree of understanding, but when the Lord says, "Peace be unto thy soul," His capacity to communicate is not limited by the English language or words alone. He can **cause** compassion to occur. Far beyond having the "good" bedside-manner, He has the "healing" bedside-manner which allows not only Him to understand where we are and what we're going through but to take away from that the fear, the desire for vindication, the desire to be better than we are.

Joseph was reminded in the same letter. Again:

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 enemies; ...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? (D&C 122:7-8)

It's because the Lord had been there that when the Lord takes compassion upon any soul, you come to understand that He and His voice **is** healing.

The Lord said very little about the ordeal that He went through. The one most complete statement, we find in Doctrine and Covenants section 19. He says, "Therefore..." (And He's been talking about the punishment.) He says,

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—

Now, that sounds almost like an Old Testament God until Christ goes on to explain why. It's in the "why" that the atonement becomes clear:

How sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not. For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that 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 that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations... (D&C 19:15-19)

Well, the incident that He's describing is recorded in Luke (he's the only one that set it out). And in Luke's account, when Christ was

...withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke22:41-44 LE)

See, what does it mean "to shrink"? Christ says at this moment—when He was there at the time that He bled from every pore—He shrunk. What does it mean to shrink? It means to cower; it means to withdraw; it means to feel completely unequal to the moment. Well, what would it be that causes Christ to feel so unworthy, to feel so unprepared, to feel so cowering that He shrunk from what it was He faced?

In Mormon chapter 9, there's this series of questions asked:

*Do ye suppose ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that [you've] ever abused his laws? Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell. For behold, when ye shall be brought to see your nakedness before God, and also the glory of God, and the holiness of Jesus Christ, **it** will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you. (Mormon 9:3-5 LE)*

That's the first part of section 19: the wrath, the anger, the sufferings that are so sore that we cannot comprehend it. Joseph said a man is his own accuser; a man is his own condemnor.

Well, of all the things from which we hope to be healed through Christ, that which is most sought after or **should be** sought after is the feeling of guilt that you have disappointed a just and holy Being. Every one of us is going to come, at some moment, into the presence of that just and holy Being. And every one of us, if we carry a burden of sin, is going to look upon His holiness and our own uncleanness and recoil in horror. **That** was the moment that Christ also bore **for us**—the moment in which He, in Gethsemane, was brought to the point that He looked upon that just and holy Being (called an angel by Luke) who came to visit with Him in this extremity, while Christ reconciled the guilt of transgression and **unholiness** with the purity and the presence of a just and holy Being. He's been there; He's done that.

We get an opportunity, from time to time, in this life—through illness and aging and infirmity, through accidents or through disappointments, through the treachery of our fellow man or the disappointment of someone backstabbing or dealing unjustly with you—you get, from time to time, an opportunity to experience a portion of what it is that the Lord can **fix**. All of those things are incidental. If they draw you back to pray to God to ask for help in the extremities you go through, that's a good thing. But in the end, what you should be coming to Christ to reconcile/to cleanse/to heal is **that form of corruption** which alienates us from Him; it's sin itself.

And for that, the words that get written by those who see it in its correct light are celebratory. After telling us that Christ is *despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows...acquainted with grief*, and how *he was wounded for our transgressions*, the Isaiah text says,

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:3,5,10-11 LE)

There's nothing you have or will go through, there's no error that you have gone and committed, there's no treachery, sin, wickedness, foolishness, or error that you have suffered which Christ does not have the knowledge with which to fix it.

The apostle Paul in Hebrews writes that we aren't ministered to by a high priest who isn't touched with our infirmities (see Hebrews 4:15 LE)—because before any of us suffered anything that we have suffered, Christ suffered it already and in full. And by His knowledge... You will never come to the Lord with a dilemma that He hasn't already obtained a solution for. You'll never come to Him with a pain or a struggle or a turmoil or a disappointment that will leave Him dumbfounded. He solved the problems; He holds the keys. And He's not merely compassionate as we are. He's compassionate in the active sense that by His knowledge/by His power/by His ability all **our** inabilities are covered.

Well, I'll finish the rest of these notes in the third hour with the priests that I'm assigned to teach today on the subject of the Atonement, as well.

Let me end by bearing testimony: Christ is not merely a distant heavenly Being. He's an immediately-connected, living Being who would—with you—share every difficulty that you're called upon to pass through in this life. Of that, I bear testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.