

I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, amen.

NOTES

1. Matthew 5:3.
2. Matthew 11:28–29.
3. 3 Nephi 12:3; italics added.
4. John 1:35–39, 43.
5. Matthew 4:19.
6. 2 Nephi 9:43.
7. See Alma 32:27; italics added.
8. See Alma 32:21.
9. 2 Nephi 31:13, 17.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 81:5.
11. See Moroni 7:45–47.
12. See Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “Ulysses,” in *The Complete Poetical Works of Tennyson* (1898), 89.
13. Alma 36:3.
14. See Alma 7:11–12.
15. “Lord, I Would Follow Thee,” *Hymns*, no. 220.
16. 1 Nephi 21:16.
17. Mark 5:36.
18. Matthew 14:27–31; italics added.
19. George Blair, “The Carpenter of Nazareth,” in Obert C. Tanner, *Christ’s Ideals for Living* (Sunday School manual, 1955), 22.

Elder Earl C. Tingey

The great plan of happiness

The prophet Jacob asked, “Why not speak of the atonement of Christ, and attain to a perfect knowledge of him?”¹

I take that question as the subject of my talk—why not speak of the Atonement of Jesus Christ?

Alma refers to the Atonement as “the great plan of happiness.”² I shall use that phrase to describe the beautiful doctrine we know as the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

President Hugh B. Brown, in speaking of the immortality of the soul, and man’s relationship to Deity, said: “Sooner or later life’s vicissitudes bring each of us to grips with this important subject. . . . Each of us, regardless of color, creed, or nationality, has a rendezvous with the experience that we call death.”³

Most of us, in sorrow and loss, have reverently stood at the grave of a loved one and asked the question, “Is there any happiness in death?”

A Book of Mormon prophet answers this question for us with joyful expressions of thanksgiving for the Atonement of Jesus Christ, which ransoms us from death: “O the wisdom of God, his mercy and

grace! . . . O the greatness and the justice of our God!”⁴

Let me share five truths of the great plan of happiness that have brought this kind of joy to me.

Reality of the Father and the Son

First: A knowledge of the plan confirms that there is a God and He has a Son, Jesus Christ. The Father and the Son are perfect. They live in heaven, and They possess glorified bodies of spirit, flesh, and bones.

These truths were revealed to us in this dispensation when the boy Joseph Smith knelt in humble prayer and later declared: “I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*”⁵

Purpose of mortal life

Second: Knowing the identity of the Father and the Son helps us know that all of us are placed on earth to acquire a

physical body, gain experience, and prove ourselves worthy to return to our Heavenly Father. Laws govern our mortal life on earth. When we transgress the law, we sin. When we sin, we break eternal laws; the law of justice requires a penalty or a punishment.

Sin and the need to repent might be represented by a man who takes a journey. On his back is a large empty bag. From time to time, he picks up a rock, representing the transgression of a law. He places the rock in the bag on his back. Over time, the bag becomes full. It is heavy. The man cannot continue on his journey. He must have a way to empty the bag and remove the rocks. This can be done only by the Savior through the Atonement.

This is possible when we exercise faith in Jesus Christ, forsake sin, and make covenants through the ordinances of the gospel. As we faithfully endure to the end, we can then return to live with our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

The eternal law of mercy

Third: Through the infinite Atonement, God has provided a means whereby we can both overcome our sins and become completely clean again. This is made possible by the eternal law of mercy. Mercy satisfies the claims of justice through our repentance and the power of the Atonement. Without the power of the Atonement and our complete repentance, we are subject to the law of justice.

Alma taught that “mercy claimeth the penitent”⁶ and that “the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance.”⁷

The great prophet Amulek taught, “And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repen-

tance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption.”⁸

Adam and Eve, our first parents, transgressed law and were cast out of the beautiful Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were taught the great plan of salvation that they might find happiness in this life.⁹

Adam said, “For because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God.”¹⁰

Eve uttered a similar acclamation of happiness: “Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption.”¹¹

Overcoming physical and spiritual death

Fourth: The Fall of Adam and Eve brought about two deaths. We are subject to those deaths.

Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the physical body. Because of the Fall of Adam, all mankind will suffer physical death.

The second death is spiritual. It is separation from God’s presence. Adam and Eve freely conversed with God in the Garden of Eden. After their transgression, they lost that privilege. Thereafter, communication from God came only through faith and sacrifice, combined with heartfelt petitioning.

Currently we are all in the state of spiritual death. We are separated from God. He dwells in heaven; we live on earth. We would like to return to Him. He is clean and perfect. We are unclean and imperfect.

The power of Christ’s Atonement overcame both deaths.

Following His Crucifixion and burial in a borrowed tomb, Christ was resurrected on the third day. This Resurrection reunited Christ’s physical body with His spirit.

The Resurrection from the dead is a most beautiful aspect of the Atonement and truly a part of the plan of happiness; the Resurrection is universal and applies to the entire human family. We will all be resurrected. I bear testimony of that fact and truth. This is an unconditional gift from God.

But to be resurrected does not overcome the second death. To gain eternal life and live in the presence of the Father and the Son, we must repent and become eligible for mercy, which will satisfy justice.

The revelations teach:

“This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God.”¹²

“Do not procrastinate the day of your repentance.”¹³

“That same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.”¹⁴

Condescension of Christ

Fifth: Jesus Christ was born of an earthly mother, Mary. From her, He inherited mortality and became subject to death.

Joseph was His earthly mentor. God in heaven was His Father. From Him, He inherited immortality, the power to overcome physical death.

As the one who was chosen to fulfill the requirements of the Atonement, Jesus Christ condescended to come to earth and be born as a helpless babe to Mary. He condescended to be tempted, tried, mocked, judged, and crucified, even though He had power and authority to prevent such actions.

President John Taylor described the condescension of Christ in these beautiful words: “It was further necessary that He should descend below all things, in order that He might raise others above all things; for if He could not raise Himself and be exalted through those principles

brought about by the atonement, He could not raise others; He could not do for others what He could not do for Himself.”¹⁵

Christ’s suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane epitomizes the most magnificent of all the attributes of Christ, His perfect love. Here we see that He truly loved all of us.

An English theologian, writing in the 19th century, said of this event: “All that the human frame can tolerate of suffering was to be heaped upon His shrinking body. . . . Pain in its acutest sting, shame in its most overwhelming brutality, all the burden of . . . sin . . . —this was what He must now face.”¹⁶

Describing His suffering, the Lord said in modern revelation, “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.”¹⁷

The Atonement is an event that enables us to be reconciled to God. The word *atonement*, or “at-one-ment,” means to restore or to come back. In terms of family, it means to be reunited with one another and with God and His Son, Jesus Christ. It means sadness through separation will become happiness through reuniting.

In conclusion, I share the words of President Boyd K. Packer:

“If you understand the great plan of happiness and follow it, what goes on in the world will not determine your happiness.”¹⁸

I bear testimony of that truth and of the love that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has shown for us by providing the Atonement, the great plan of happiness, for all of us. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Jacob 4:12.
2. Alma 42:8; see also 2 Nephi 9:13; Alma 12:32; 34:9, 16; 41:2; 42:15; Moses 6:62.
3. In Conference Report, Apr. 1967, 48.

4. 2 Nephi 9:8, 17.
5. Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
6. Alma 42:23.
7. Alma 42:13.
8. Alma 34:16.
9. See Alma 12:32.
10. Moses 5:10.
11. Moses 5:11.
12. Alma 34:32.
13. Alma 34:33.
14. Alma 34:34.
15. *The Mediation and Atonement* (1882), 144.
16. Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (1994), 575.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 19:18.
18. In Conference Report, Apr. 1994, 26; or *Ensign*, May 1994, 20.

The choir and congregation sang
“Redeemer of Israel.”

Sister Anne C. Pingree

Growing up unto the Lord

Some months ago I rode in a car with two courageous senior sister missionaries. They were determined to find a ward member’s apartment in the heart of an inner-city neighborhood in the eastern United States. As I sat in the backseat holding my breath, the car’s guidance system regularly blared, “Wrong turn, wrong turn!” Undaunted, the missionary reading the map just kept suggesting way after way through the maze of city streets until finally we found the home of the sister whom they had promised to teach how to read and write.

In their actions and attitudes, these remarkable sisters embodied something that is much more than a reflection of their mortal years. They demonstrated true spiritual maturity.

Helaman, the great Book of Mormon prophet, named his sons Nephi and Lehi after their forebears, and “they began to grow up unto the Lord.”¹ Young or older, all of us must do the same.

This idea of growing up unto the Lord is a compelling one. Unlike the process of growing up physically, we will not mature spiritually until we *choose*, as the Apostle Paul phrased it, to “put away childish things.”²

Daily prayer and scripture study, adherence to commandments and to cov-

enants made at baptism and in the temple are at the core of growing up unto the Lord. We learn to walk in His ways as we do what draws us closer to Heavenly Father and as we teach our children and others to do the same. We “put away childish things” as we choose to become Christlike and serve others as He would have us do.

Determined service to others

When the Church was organized in this dispensation, the Lord explained that those who “shall be received by baptism into his church” would be, in part, those “willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end.”³ That means remaining “steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works”⁴ each day of our lives. Today, as the Church grows in 170 nations throughout the earth, *determined service to others*, even in difficult circumstances, is required of those who truly desire “to grow up unto the Lord.” This expansion of the Church means many of us will have opportunities to serve those who are new converts.

I participated in a memorable example of such determined service to those who are new to the gospel when I accompanied those dedicated sister missionaries—one a widow close to 80 years and the other a single parent in her 60s—who