

# The Atonement

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Wherever our members and missionaries may go, our message is one of faith and hope in the Savior Jesus Christ.

My message is directed to those among us who are suffering, burdened down with guilt and weakness and failure, sorrow, and despair.

In 1971, I was assigned to stake conferences in Western Samoa, including the organization of a new stake on Upolu island. After interviews we chartered a small plane to Savai'i island to hold a stake conference there. The plane landed on a grassy field at Faala and was to return the next afternoon to take us back to Upolu island.

The day we were to return from Savai'i, it was raining. Knowing the plane could not land on the wet field, we drove to the west end of the island, where there was a runway of sorts atop a coral break. We waited until dark, but no plane arrived. Finally, we learned by radio that there was a storm, and the plane could not take off. We radioed back that we would come by boat. Someone was to meet us at Mulifanua.

As we pulled out of port on Savai'i, the captain of the 40-foot (12 m) boat asked the mission president if he had a flashlight. Fortunately, he did and made a present of it to the captain. We made the 13-mile (21 km) crossing to Upolu island on very rough seas. None of us realized that a ferocious tropical storm had hit the island, and we were heading straight into it.

We arrived in the harbor at Mulifanua. There was one narrow passage we were to go through along the reef. A light on the hill above the beach and a second lower light marked the narrow passage. When a boat was maneuvered so that the two lights were one above the other, the boat would be lined up properly to pass through the dangerous rocks that lined the passage.

But that night there was only one light. Two elders were waiting on the landing to meet us, but the crossing took much longer than usual. After watching for hours for signs of our boat, the elders tired and fell asleep, neglecting to turn on the second light, the lower light. As a result, the passage through the reef was not clear.

The captain maneuvered the boat as best he could toward the one upper light on shore while a crewman held the borrowed flashlight over the bow, searching for rocks ahead. We could hear the breakers crashing over the reef. When we were close enough to see them with the flashlight, the captain frantically shouted reverse and backed away to try again to locate the passage.

After many attempts, he knew it would be impossible to find the passage. All we could do was try to reach the harbor at Apia 40 miles (64 km) away. We were helpless against the ferocious power of the elements. I do not

remember ever being where it was so dark.

We made no progress for the first hour, even though the engine was at full throttle. The boat would struggle up a mountainous wave and then pause in exhaustion at the top of the crest with the propellers out of the water. The vibration of the propellers would shake the boat almost to pieces before it slid down the other side.

We were lying spread-eagled on the cover of the cargo hold, holding on with our hands on one side and with our toes locked on the other to keep from being washed overboard. Brother Mark Littleford lost hold and was thrown against the low iron rail. His head was cut, but the rail kept him from being washed away.

Eventually, we moved ahead and near daylight finally pulled into the harbor at Apia. Boats were lashed to one another for safety. They were several deep at the pier. We crawled across them, trying not to disturb those sleeping on deck. We made our way to Pesega, dried our clothing, and headed for Vailuutai to organize the new stake.

I do not know who had been waiting for us at the beach at Mulifanua. I refused to let them tell me. But it is true that without that lower light, we all might have been lost.

There is in our hymnbook a very old and seldom-sung hymn that has very special meaning to me.

Brightly beams our Father's mercy  
From his lighthouse evermore,  
But to us he gives the keeping  
Of the lights along the shore.  
Let the lower lights be burning;  
Send a gleam across the wave.  
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman  
You may rescue, you may save.

Dark the night of sin has settled;  
Loud the angry billows roar.  
Eager eyes are watching, longing,  
For the lights along the shore.

Trim your feeble lamp, my brother;  
Some poor sailor, tempest-tossed,  
Trying now to make the harbor,  
In the darkness may be lost.<sup>1</sup>

I speak today to those who may be lost and are searching for that lower light to help guide them back.

It was understood from the beginning that in mortality we would fall short of being perfect. It was not expected that we would live without transgressing one law or another.

“For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord.”<sup>2</sup>

From the Pearl of Great Price, we understand that “no unclean thing can dwell [in the kingdom of God],”<sup>3</sup> and so a way was provided for all who sin to repent and become worthy of the presence of our Father in Heaven once

more.

A Mediator, a Redeemer, was chosen, one who would live His life perfectly, commit no sin, and offer “himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.”<sup>4</sup>

Concerning the importance of the Atonement, in Alma we learn, “For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; ... or else all mankind must unavoidably perish.”<sup>5</sup>

If you have made no mistakes, then you do not need the Atonement. If you have made mistakes, and all of us have, whether minor or serious, then you have an enormous need to find out how they can be erased so that you are no longer in darkness.

“[Jesus Christ] is the light and the life of the world.”<sup>6</sup> As we fix our gaze on His teachings, we will be guided to the harbor of spiritual safety.

The third article of faith states, “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”<sup>7</sup>

President Joseph F. Smith taught: “Men cannot forgive their own sins; they cannot cleanse themselves from the consequences of their sins. Men can stop sinning and can do right in the future, and so far [as] their acts are acceptable before the Lord [become] worthy of consideration. But who shall repair the wrongs they have done to themselves and to others, which it seems impossible for them to repair themselves? By the atonement of Jesus Christ the sins of the repentant shall be washed away; though they be crimson they shall be made white as wool [see Isaiah 1:18]. This is the promise given to you.”<sup>8</sup>

We do not know exactly how the Lord accomplished the Atonement. But we do know that the cruel torture of crucifixion was only part of the horrific pain which began in Gethsemane—that sacred site of suffering—and was completed on Golgotha.

Luke records:

“He 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.”<sup>9</sup>

So far as I have been able to tell, there is only one account in the Savior’s own words that describes what He endured in the Garden of Gethsemane. The revelation records:

“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.”<sup>10</sup>

Throughout your life there may be times when you have gone places you never should have gone and done things you never should have done. If you will turn away from sin, you will be able one day to know the peace that comes from following the pathway of complete repentance.

No matter what our transgressions have been, no matter how much our actions may have hurt others, that guilt can all be wiped out. To me, perhaps the most beautiful phrase in all scripture is when the Lord said, “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.”<sup>11</sup>

That is the promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Atonement: to take anyone who comes, anyone who will join, and put them through an experience so that at the end of their life, they can go through the veil having repented of their sins and having been washed clean through the blood of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

That is what Latter-day Saints do around the world. That is the Light we offer to those who are in darkness and have lost their way. Wherever our members and missionaries may go, our message is one of faith and hope in the Savior Jesus Christ.

President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote the lyrics to the hymn “Does the Journey Seem Long?” He was a dear friend of mine. It contains encouragement and a promise to those who seek to follow the teachings of the Savior:

Does the journey seem long,  
The path rugged and steep?  
Are there briars and thorns on the way?  
Do sharp stones cut your feet  
As you struggle to rise  
To the heights thru the heat of the day?

Is your heart faint and sad,  
Your soul weary within,  
As you toil 'neath your burden of care?  
Does the load heavy seem  
You are forced now to lift?  
Is there no one your burden to share?

Let your heart be not faint  
Now the journey's begun;  
There is One who still beckons to you.  
So look upward in joy  
And take hold of his hand;  
He will lead you to heights that are new—

A land holy and pure,  
Where all trouble doth end,  
And your life shall be free from all sin,  
Where no tears shall be shed,  
For no sorrows remain.  
Take his hand and with him enter in.<sup>13</sup>

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

# Notes

1. “Brightly Beams Our Father’s Mercy,” *Hymns*, no. 335.
2. Mosiah 3:19.
3. Moses 6:57.
4. 2 Nephi 2:7.
5. Alma 34:9.
6. Mosiah 16:9.
7. Articles of Faith 1:3.
8. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 99–100.
9. Luke 22:41–44.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–18.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.
12. See Revelation 1:5.
13. “Does the Journey Seem Long?” *Hymns*, no. 127.

