

The Blessings of Worship

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His Visit

One of the most remarkable and tender experiences recorded in holy scripture is the account of the visit of the Savior to people in the Americas following His death and Resurrection. The people had suffered a destruction so great that it caused "the whole earth [to become] deformed."¹ The record of those events relates that following the catastrophe, all the people wept continually,² and in the midst of their deep grief, they hungered for healing, peace, and deliverance.

When the Savior descended from heaven, the people twice fell at His feet. The first time occurred after He pronounced, with divine authority:

"Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

"And behold, I am the light and the life of the world."³

He then invited those present to "arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world. ...

"And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying:

"Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God!"⁴

And then, for a second time, "they did fall down at the feet of Jesus." But this time with purpose, for we learn that they "did worship him."⁵

Present Day

Earlier this year I was on assignment visiting a stake in the western United States. It was a normal Sunday, a normal meeting, with normal members of the Church. I

watched as people entered the chapel and reverently moved to available seats. Last-second, whispered conversations echoed throughout the hall. Mothers and fathers tried—sometimes in vain—to quiet energetic children. Normal.

But then, before the meeting began, words inspired of the Spirit came into my mind.

These members had not come just to fulfill a duty or listen to speakers.

They had come for a deeper and far more significant reason.

They had come to worship.

As the meeting progressed, I observed various members in the congregation. They had an almost heavenly expression, an attitude of reverence and peace. Something about them warmed my heart. The experience they were having that Sunday was something quite extraordinary.

They were worshipping.

They were experiencing heaven.

I could see it in their countenances.

And I rejoiced and worshipped with them. And as I did so, the Spirit spoke to my heart. And on that day, I learned something about myself, about God, and about the role of true worship in our lives.

Worship in Our Everyday Lives

Latter-day Saints are exceptional when it comes to serving in Church callings. But sometimes we may go about our work routinely, as though we are merely performing a job. Sometimes our attendance at meetings and our service in the kingdom may lack the holy element of worship. And without that, we are missing an incomparable spiritual encounter with the infinite—one we are entitled to as children of a loving Heavenly Father.

Far from being an accidental, happy occurrence, worship is essential and central to our spiritual life. It is something we should yearn for, seek out, and strive to experience.

What Is Worship?

When we worship God, we approach Him with reverent love, humility, and adoration. We acknowledge and accept Him as our sovereign King, the Creator of the universe, our beloved and infinitely loving Father.

We respect and revere Him.

We submit ourselves to Him.

We lift our hearts in mighty prayer, cherish His word, rejoice in His grace, and commit to follow Him with dedicated loyalty.

Worshipping God is such an essential element in the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ that if we fail to receive Him in our hearts, we will seek for Him in vain in our councils, churches, and temples.

True disciples are drawn to “worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters—calling upon the name of the Lord day and night.”⁶

We can learn much about true worship by examining how others—people who perhaps were not so different from ourselves—encountered, behaved, and worshipped in the presence of the divine.

Wonder, Gratitude, and Hope

In the first part of the 19th century, the Christian world had all but abandoned the idea that God still spoke to man. But in the spring of 1820, that changed forever when a humble farm boy entered a grove of trees and knelt to pray. From that day on, a stream of remarkable visions, revelations, and heavenly appearances have bathed the earth, endowing its inhabitants with precious knowledge regarding the nature and purpose of God and His relationship with man.

Oliver Cowdery described those days as “never to be forgotten. ... What joy! what wonder! what amazement!”⁷

Oliver’s words convey the first elements that accompany true worship of the divine—a sense of majestic awe and profound thanksgiving.

Every day, but especially on the Sabbath day, we have the extraordinary opportunity to experience the wonder and awe of heaven and offer our praises to God for His blessed goodness and overwhelming mercy.

This will lead us to hope. These are the first elements of worship.

Light, Knowledge, and Faith

On the blessed day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit entered into the hearts and minds of the disciples of Christ, filling them with light and knowledge.

Until that day they were at times unsure of what they should do. Jerusalem had become a dangerous place for a follower of the Savior, and they must have wondered

what would become of them.

But when the Holy Spirit filled their hearts, doubt and reluctance vanished. Through the transcendent experience of true worship, the Saints of God received heavenly light, knowledge, and a strengthened testimony. And that led to faith.

From that moment on, the Apostles and Saints acted with determined direction. With boldness they preached Christ Jesus to all the world.

When we worship in spirit, we invite light and truth into our souls, which strengthens our faith. These too are necessary elements of true worship.

Discipleship and Charity

In the Book of Mormon we learn that from the moment Alma the Younger was delivered from suffering the consequences of his own rebelliousness, he was never the same. He boldly “traveled throughout all the land ... and among all the people ... , zealously striving to repair all the injuries which [he] had done to the church.”⁸

His constant worship of the Almighty God took the form of energetic discipleship.

True worship transforms us into sincere and earnest disciples of our beloved Master and Savior, Jesus Christ. We change and become more like Him.

We become more understanding and caring. More forgiving. More loving.

We understand that it is impossible to say that we love God while at the same time hating, dismissing, or disregarding others around us.⁹

True worship leads to an unwavering determination to walk the path of discipleship. And that leads inevitably to charity. These too are necessary elements of worship.

Enter into His Gates with Thanksgiving

When I reflect back on what began as a normal Sunday morning, in that normal meetinghouse, in that normal stake, even today I am moved by that extraordinary spiritual experience that will forever bless my life.

I learned that even if we are exceptional managers of our time, callings, and assignments—even if we check all the boxes on our list of the “perfect” individual, family, or leader—if we fail to worship our merciful Deliverer, heavenly King, and glorious God, we are missing much of the joy and peace of the gospel.

When we worship God, we acknowledge and receive Him with the same reverence as those ancient people of the Americas. We approach Him with incomprehensible

feelings of wonder and awe. We marvel in gratitude at the goodness of God. And thus, we acquire hope.

We ponder God's word, and that fills our souls with light and truth. We comprehend spiritual vistas that can be seen only through the light of the Holy Ghost.¹⁰ And thus, we acquire faith.

As we worship, our souls are refined and we commit to walk in the footsteps of our beloved Savior, Jesus Christ. And from this resolve, we acquire charity.

When we worship, our hearts are drawn out in praise to our blessed God morning, noon, and night.

We hallow and honor Him continually—in our meetinghouses, homes, temples, and all our labors.

When we worship, we open our hearts to the healing power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Our lives become the token and expression of our worship.

My brothers and sisters, spiritual experiences have less to do with what is happening around us and everything to do with what is happening within our hearts. It is my witness that true worship will transform ordinary Church meetings into extraordinary spiritual feasts. It will enrich our lives, broaden our understanding, and strengthen our testimonies. For as we incline our hearts to God, like the ancient Psalmist, we “enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: [we are] thankful unto him, and bless his name.

“For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”¹¹

Through sincere and heartfelt worship, we blossom and mature in hope, faith, and charity. And through that process, we gather heavenly light into our souls that infuses our lives with divine meaning, abiding peace, and everlasting joy.

That is the blessing of worship in our lives. Of this I humbly testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.