

Sunday, October 2

Third Day

ducted by Jay E. Welch of the Tabernacle Choir.

After the singing, Bishop Robert L. Simpson of the Presiding Bishopric will be our speaker.

Congregational Singing: "How Firm a Foundation."

Bishop Robert L. Simpson is our next speaker.

Bishop Robert L. Simpson Of the Presiding Bishopric

Biblical history tells us that no mortal man has ever been subjected to the humility, the pain, the suffering that were experienced by the Savior of the world during his final hours of mortality.

Following a number of false charges, he was betrayed by one considered to be among his closest circle of friends. He was then subjected to a so-called trial, which produced a sentence that was dictated by political convenience and public sentiment rather than justice.

Then in rapid agonizing succession: there was the long struggle to Calvary as he bore the heavy cross; he was jeered at and spat upon by the multitude all along the way; there was the offering of vinegar, climaxed by the cruel spikes; and finally, there he hung, his body broken and bleeding, still taunted by his enemies; and it was in the midst of all this that Jesus plead perhaps quietly, with deep reverence, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. . . ." (Luke 23:34.)

With this plea of forgiveness in behalf of his oppressors, Jesus indeed practiced what he taught, for it was during his remarkable Sermon on the Mount that he said: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Matt. 5:44.)

Forgiveness

In contemplating the subject of forgiveness as a possible conference theme, it was most enlightening to observe the overwhelming importance of this oft-neglected principle as a necessary prerequisite to individual salvation and exaltation.

Repentance

First of all, it must be recognized that the great principle of repentance is largely dependent upon forgiveness. He who has transgressed and then decides to repent is expected to seek out those he has offended, to solicit their forgiveness. I know of one man who carried his grudge to the grave after 40 long, bitter years of refusing to forgive. What a tragedy! His light was never able to shine forth as intended. As recorded in 1 John, "But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." (1 John 2:11.) Paul wrote to the Saints at Corinth about the importance of forgiving readily, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices." (2 Cor. 2:11.)

Only as we forgive do we earn the right to be forgiven. This is an eternal principle, so taught by the Savior when he said: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." (Matt. 6:14.)

Paul certainly understood this great truth, for he taught: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Eph. 4:32.)

Not only need we forgive to be forgiven, but we must also repent to earn this great blessing. A prophet of our day has recorded that the repentant "shall be forgiven, according to the covenants and commandments of the church." (D&C 68:24.) Then this sweet assurance followed: ". . . and I, the Lord, remember them no more." (D&C 58:42.)

The principle of growth

This, brothers and sisters, is the hope of mankind, to have our mistakes wiped clean. There is no other way; there are no shortcuts in the kingdom of God. We repent, we forgive, we progress, and may we remind ourselves once more, it all starts with our own willingness to forgive one another. Yes, after all is said and done, the Golden Rule still stands supreme, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." (See Matt. 7:12.) First forgive and then stand eligible in the sight of God to be forgiven. The simplicity of the process testifies of its divinity.

Now, in case someone has forgotten the extent of our obligation in forgiving that wayward neighbor, just remember 70 times 7 is 490. But we will never make it to 490, because if we follow the Lord's formula with sincerity, something very special always comes into our lives and into the lives of our neighbors long before we achieve 70 times 7.

Another interesting observation is made by the Lord for the benefit of all who come close to him with their lips but whose hearts are far from him. Too frequently we come to worship and to leave our offerings without attempting to prepare our inner selves to the same degree of perfection that we achieve in our outward dress and grooming.

Be reconciled

It was Matthew who advised such folks to "leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; *first be reconciled to thy brother*, and then come and offer thy gift." (Matt. 5:24. Italics added.) So it appears that a generous offering of time, talent, or means to the building of the kingdom is not fully acceptable if we bear such gifts without first truly forgiving our offenders. In so doing, we guarantee forgiveness for our own weaknesses.

Forgiveness and good-will dispel bitterness

Lillian Watson has recorded an interesting episode from the ministry of Phillips Brooks, a great American

clergyman, as he addressed his affluent, well-dressed congregation on a Sunday morning in Boston nearly 100 years ago:

"He looked into the faces of men and women he long had known, men and women who had come to him with their problems, who had asked for his help and guidance. How well he knew what seethed behind the pleasant, smiling masks of their Sunday-best respectability! How well he knew the petty spites that embittered their hearts, the animosities that set neighbor against neighbor, the silly quarrels that were kept alive, the jealousies and misunderstandings, the stubborn pride!

"Today his message was for those bitter, unbending ones who refused to forgive and forget. He must make them realize that life is too short to nurse grievances, to harbor grudges and resentments. He would plead for tolerance and understanding, for sympathy and kindness. He would plead for brotherly love.

"'Oh, my dear friends' he said, . . . and it was as though he spoke to each separately and alone:

"'You who are letting miserable misunderstanding run on from year to year, meaning to clear them up some day;

"'You who are keeping wretched quarrels alive because you cannot quite make up your mind that now is the day to sacrifice your pride;

"'You who are passing men sullenly upon the street, not speaking to them out of some silly spite, and yet knowing that it would fill you with shame and remorse if you heard that one of those men were dead tomorrow morning;

"'You who are . . . letting your friend's heart ache for a word of appreciation or sympathy, which you mean to give him someday;

"'If you only could know and see and feel, all of a sudden, that the time is short, how it would break the spell! How you would go instantly and do the thing which you might never have another chance to do.'

"As the congregation poured out of the church that Sunday morning, people who hadn't spoken in years suddenly smiled and greeted each

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other . . . and discovered it was what they had been wanting to do all along. Neighbors who had disliked and avoided each other walked home together . . . and were astonished to find how very much they enjoyed doing it. Many who had been grudging and unkind firmly resolved to be more generous in the future, more considerate of others . . . and all at once felt happier and more content, felt at peace with themselves and the world.

"'Forgive,' Phillips Brooks urged his congregation. 'Forget. Bear with the faults of others as you would have them bear with yours. Be patient and understanding. Life is too short to be vengeful or malicious. Life is too short to be petty or unkind. . . .'"

So spoke Phillips Brooks one hundred years ago, that great humanitarian who, incidentally, composed the words to that favorite Christmas hymn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

We need not reach back one hundred years for an example of bitter hearts. Such feelings are common in these very last of latter days. Unwillingness to forgive on a person-to-person basis is indeed a major and chronic illness of today's world.

"Love the Lord thy God"

"Love the Lord thy God!" This is the number one foundation of all Christianity, and the second is like unto it, "Love thy neighbour as thyself." How can you love God and hate your neighbor? You cannot! So forgive right now, today. That is the beginning of love, for forgiveness is indeed the prime ingredient of love. It is the function of love.

Not one of us is incapable of calling to mind, this very instant, a person who has offended in some way; and if my understanding of the scriptures is correct, we had better make it a matter of urgent business to forgive

that person, whether he asks it or not. Woe unto that man who stands stubbornly in the way of another's plea for repentance by failure to forgive, "for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin."

"I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men." (D&C 64:9-10.)

Yes, forgiveness enlarges the soul, for "he that loveth his brother abideth in the light. . . ." (1 John 2:10.) To abide in light is to abide in the pathway that leads to the very presence of our Heavenly Father. In forgiveness there is a divine satisfaction that is also sublime. The fruit is sweet, the way is easy, and the time is so short. Slow forgiveness is almost no forgiveness.

Yes, brothers and sisters, as long as man lives in his mortal state, we will be confronted with imperfection, with our main chore to overcome that imperfection. As we forgive, we achieve the right to be forgiven. As we forgive, we increase our capacity for light and understanding. As we forgive, we live beyond the power of the adversary. As we forgive, our capacity for love expands toward heaven. And as we forgive, we approach the ability to stand one day in the midst of oppressors who do their ugly deeds out of ignorance and misdirection with the capacity to say, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34.) In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Joseph Fielding Smith:

Elder Boyd K. Packer, Assistant to the Twelve, and now presiding in the New England Mission, will speak to us. He will be followed by Elder Alvin R. Dyer, Assistant to the Twelve.