

you will have prayed, listened, obeyed, and come to share the thoughts and intents of his heart. You will have drawn nearer to him.

I pray that we will. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Thank you, Bishop Eyring. Elder James E. Faust of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will now address us.

Elder James E. Faust

A crown of thorns

My beloved brothers and sisters and friends, today I wish to speak of thorns, briars, slivers, and a crown of thorns. I also wish to speak of the exquisite beauty and fragrance to be found in life, and of a crown of glory. I wish that I better understood all of the divine purposes in having to contend with so many painful irritants in this life. Lehi explained one reason: that we will appreciate and savor the goodness and loveliness of the world (see 2 Nephi 2:10–13). Adam was told that the ground is cursed with thorns and thistles for our sakes (see Genesis 3:17–18). Likewise, mortality is “cursed” with the thorns of worldly temptation and the slivers of sin so that we can be tested and prove ourselves. This is necessary for our eternal progression. The Apostle Paul explained, “Lest I should be exalted above measure . . . , there was given to me a thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7).

The denial of our own sins, of our own selfishness, of our own weakness is like a crown of thorns which keeps us from moving up one more step in personal growth. Perhaps worse than sin is the denial of sin. If we deny that we are sinners, how can we ever be forgiven? How can the atonement of Jesus work in our lives if there is no repentance? If we do not promptly remove the slivers of sin and the thorns of carnal temptation, how can the Lord ever heal our souls? The Savior said, “Repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may

heal you” (3 Nephi 9:13). It is most difficult for us to pray for those who hate us, who spitefully use us, who persecute us. By failing to take this vital extra step, however, we fail to remove some of the festering briars in our souls. Extending forgiveness, love, and understanding for perceived shortcomings and weaknesses in our wives, husbands, children, and associates makes it much easier to say, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

It seems that no matter how carefully we walk through life’s paths, we pick up some thorns, briars, and slivers. As a young boy, when school was out for the summer and we went to the farm, off came our shoes. The shoes stayed off all summer long except for special occasions. For the first week or two, when our feet were tender, the smoothest pebble or stick would be painful. But as the weeks came and went, the soles of our feet toughened so that they could withstand almost anything in the path except thistles, of which there seemed to be more than any other weed. And so it is with life: as we grow and mature and keep close to Him who was crowned with thorns, our souls seem to get stronger in withstanding the challenges, our resolve hardens, our wills become firmer, and our self-discipline increases to protect us from the evils of this world. These evils are so omnipresent, however, that we must always walk in the paths which are the most free of the thistles of earthly temptation.

As children we used to delight in waving thistledown stalks to watch the seeds float on the wind. Only later did we realize the effects that this had on our own and neighboring gardens. Many of us delight in flirting with temptation, only later to learn how we and others have sown the seeds of our own unhappiness and how we can also affect our neighbor's happiness.

Recognizing and removing thorns

There is a defense mechanism to discern between good and evil. It is called conscience. It is our spirit's natural response to the pain of sin, just like pain in our flesh is our body's natural response to a wound—even a small sliver. Conscience strengthens through use. Paul told the Hebrews, "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14). Those who have not exercised their conscience have "their conscience scared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2). A sensitive conscience is a sign of a healthy spirit.

How are the thorns and slivers of life removed? The power to remove the thorns in our lives and in the lives of others begins with ourselves. Moroni writes that when we deny ourselves of ungodliness, then the grace of Christ is sufficient for us (see Moroni 10:32).

Too often we seek bandages to cover the guilt rather than removal of the thorn causing the pain. How much we resist the momentary pain of removing a sliver even though it will relieve the longer-lasting pain of a festering sore. Everyone knows that if thorns and briars and slivers are not removed from the flesh, they will cause sores that fester and will not heal.

One of the members of our family has a remarkable dog named Ben. A few years ago, on a beautiful fall day, some of us were walking in the fields.

Ben was going back and forth in front of us, sniffing the ground, tail wagging, and obviously enjoying himself. After a while we sat down on a ditch bank to rest and could feel the warmth of the autumn sun caressing us. Ben came limping up to his master and, with a pained look in his eye, held up his front paw. Ben's master gently took his paw into his hands and examined it carefully. Between two of his toes was a thorn. The thorn was carefully removed, and Ben stayed long enough to wag his tail a little more vigorously and receive a few pats on his head. He then ran off, no longer limping nor bothered by the pain. I was amazed that Ben instinctively seemed to know that the thorn needed to come out to relieve the pain and to know where to go to have it removed. Like Ben, we also seem to instinctively look for relief from the thorns of sin that inflict us. In contrast, however, we do not always seek our Master for relief; and many do not yet know who their Master is.

Jesus suffered thorns of affliction

As a carpenter, Jesus would have been familiar with slivers and thorny woods. As a child he would have learned that one rarely gets a sliver when working the wood in the right direction. He would also have known more than any how slivers—small and painful—divert attention from important matters. The scourging of Jesus took place partly with thorns:

"Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.

"And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.

"And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

"And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head" (Matthew 27:27-30).

Perhaps this cruel act was a perverse attempt to mimic the placing of an emperor's laurel upon his head. Thus, there was pressed down upon him a crown of thorns. He accepted the pain as part of the great gift he had promised to make. How poignant this was, considering that thorns signified God's displeasure as he cursed the ground for Adam's sake that henceforth it would bring forth thorns. But by wearing the crown, Jesus transformed thorns into a symbol of his glory. As Emily Dickinson so aptly described it:

One crown that no one seeks
And yet the highest head
Its isolation coveted
Its stigma deified.
[*The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960), pp. 703-4]

Because he was focused on giving, neither the adulation nor the scorn of the world could deflect him from his mission.

Our Savior knows "according to the flesh" every dimension of our suffering. There is no infirmity he is not familiar with. In his agony he became acquainted with all of the thorns, slivers, and thistles that might afflict us:

"And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

"And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his

people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:11-12).

All irritants of the flesh and the soul should be removed before they fester. However, though they ulcerate and though they torment, they can still be removed, and the healing process will take place. When the infection is healed, the soreness will leave. That process is known as repentance. Repentance and forgiveness are among the greatest fruits of the Atonement. It is not easy to remove the thorns of pride, the thistles of selfishness, the slivers of ego, and the briars of appetite.

Concentrate on flowers, not thorns

In Roselandia, Brazil, outside the great city of São Paulo, there are many acres of beautiful roses. When one stands on a small hill above the rose fields, the aroma is delightful and the beauty is exhilarating. The thorns on the bushes are there, but they in no way lessen the enjoyment of the sight and the smell. I would challenge all to put the thorns, slivers, and thistles we encounter in life in proper perspective. We should deal with them but then concentrate on the flowers of life, not on the thorns. We should savor the smell and beauty of the flower of the rose and the cactus. To savor the sweet aroma of the blossoms, we need to live righteous and disciplined lives in which the study of the scriptures, prayer, right priorities, and right attitudes are integrated into our lives. For members of this church, that focus sharpens inside of our temples. We will all surely encounter some of the thorns, but they are only incidental to the sweet fragrances and exquisite beauty of the blooms. Did not the Savior say: "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" (Matthew 7:16).

Thomas Carlyle, a British writer, stated, "Every noble crown is, and on

Earth will forever be, a crown of thorns" (*Past and Present* [London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1912], 3:173). The ancient Latin phrase *sic transit gloria mundi* means "thus passes away the glory of this world." Earthly rewards can be a sore temptation. In contrast, those who are faithful and are committed to service are promised that they will be "crowned with honor, and glory, and immortality, and eternal life" (D&C 75:5). Thus, neither honors nor trials can defeat. Paul spoke of an incorruptible crown (see 1 Corinthians 9:25), and James spoke of the faithful receiving a "crown of life" (James 1:12). John the Revelator counseled, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Revelation 3:11).

"Let him deny himself"

I believe that earthly crowns such as power, the love of money, the preoccupation with material things, the honors of men are a crown of thorns because they are based upon obtaining and receiving rather than giving. So selfishness can make what we think is a noble crown into a crown of thorns beyond our power to endure. When I first started my professional career, one of the senior members in our office asked another senior member for some help on a legal matter. The other man who was asked to help was gifted and able but also selfish. He replied, "What's in it for me?" The "what's in it for me?" philosophy is basically what's wrong with the world. It is surely one of the sharpest points in a crown of thorns.

The call of Jesus Christ to each of us is, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Is it not time that we begin denying ourselves, as the Savior counseled, and surrender and master ourselves rather

than indulge ourselves in a "do my own thing" selfish little world? The question is not so much what we can do, but what God can do through us. Paul said, "If a man therefore purge himself . . . , he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Timothy 2:21).

Taking up one's cross and following the Savior is always a commitment to service. When going to school I was very poor. I worked long hours in a canning factory catching steaming-hot cans for twenty-five cents an hour. I learned that selfishness has more to do with how we feel about what we have than how much we have. A poor man can be selfish and a rich man generous, but a person obsessed only with getting will have a hard time to find God. I have come to know that with any privilege comes responsibility. Most privilege carries with it the responsibility to serve, to give, and to bless. God can take away any privilege if it is not used under his omnipotent will. Meeting that challenge to give, to serve, to bless in faithfulness and devotion is the only way to enjoy the crown of glory spoken of by the original Apostles. It is the only way true meaning comes to life. We will be able to receive honors or scorn with equal serenity.

A crown of glory for the faithful

I conclude with the words of Ezekiel, "And thou, son of man, . . . though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid" (Ezekiel 2:6). In our constantly changing world, may we continually cling to those things that do not change: to prayer, to faith, to saving covenants, to love of families, and to brotherhood. By removing the slivers of sin and the thorns of worldly temptation in our lives, and by denying ourselves and taking up our own cross

and following the Savior, we can change a crown of thorns to a crown of glory. I testify, as one of his humble servants called to be his special witness, that he lives. I witness from the depths of my soul that we are engaged in his holy work, to which, if we are faithful, we can be crowned with honor, glory, and eternal life (see D&C 75:5). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Let My Heart Be Pure" without announcement.

President Hinckley

Elder James E. Faust of the Council of the Twelve has addressed us, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "Let My Heart Be Pure."

Following my remarks, the choir will conclude this session by singing "Help Me Teach with Inspiration." The benediction will then be offered by Bishop Robert D. Hales, Presiding Bishop of the Church. This conference will then be adjourned until two o'clock this afternoon.

At one o'clock the Nauvoo Bell and other bells across the nation will ring as part of the three days of national thanksgiving commemorating the end of the Persian Gulf War.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Granddaughters' wedding ceremonies

Ten days ago, I had a beautiful and touching experience in the Salt Lake Temple, the building immediately to the east of this tabernacle. There in that holy sanctuary I had the privilege of sealing in marriage, in two separate but consecutive ceremonies, two beautiful young women who are twins, each to a handsome and able young man of her choice. That evening a double wedding reception was held where hundreds of friends came to express their love and good wishes.

Mothers often shed tears at a wedding ceremony. Sisters also, and sometimes fathers. Seldom do grandparents show any emotion. But these beautiful girls were my own granddaughters, and I must confess that this old grandfather choked up and had a difficult time. I don't understand why. Certainly it was a happy occasion, a fulfillment of dreams and prayers. Perhaps my tears were really an expression of joy and of gratitude to God for these lovely brides and their handsome young husbands.

In sacred promises, they pledged their love and loyalty one to another for time and all eternity.

Marriage is ordained of God

How wonderful a thing is marriage under the plan of our Eternal Father, a plan provided in His divine wisdom for the happiness and security of His children and the continuity of the race.

He is our Creator, and He designed marriage from the beginning. At the time of Eve's creation, "Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: . . .

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:23-24).

Paul wrote to the Corinthian Saints, "Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:11).

In modern revelation the Lord has said, "And again, verily I say unto you,