

2016.08.28 Sunday Talk

Good morning brothers and sisters. My name is Elder Sobkowicz. My wife and I are so thankful to be on a seniors' mission and to be serving here in Melbourne. It is a privilege to be with you and share some gospel thoughts this morning.

As you have no doubt discerned by now, our family is far from "perfect" (in any sense of the word). Sister Sobkowicz and I both came from difficult family circumstances. When we were married, we were both "green" as far as the gospel was concerned - we lacked both knowledge and experience in the gospel, and thus had to approach almost everything in our married life with a great deal of faith (we didn't have anything else!). We had many challenges as we grew spiritually - challenges with schooling, work, and raising a family. We had children that tested our desire to live the gospel to the limit. In other words, we were a normal family encountering the normal vicissitudes of life!

Our approach was to learn from the good people around us and apply gospel principles in a thoughtful, prayerful and faithful manner (at least, that was the theory). And we tried to endure and persevere, although we weren't always sure that was what we were doing - we were just trying to survive! We made a lot of mistakes, but Heavenly Father blessed us because of the desire of our hearts and because we acted in faith. Such is the case with all who strive to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Sister Sobkowicz has talked to you today about self-reliance and about creating Zion here in our own church communities. I've heard that scripture many times and, to be honest, have always thought about creating Zion as something that would happen in the future. Elder Christopherson had this to say about developing a Zion community (November 2008 Ensign): "If we would establish Zion in our homes, branches, wards, and stakes, we must rise to this standard. It will be necessary (1) to become unified in one heart and one mind; (2) to become, individually and collectively, a holy people; and (3) to care for the poor and needy with such effectiveness that we eliminate poverty among us. We cannot wait until Zion comes for these things to happen—Zion will come only as they happen". (Moses 7:18 - The Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them). One thing I learned from this quote is that we are creating Zion in our branches, wards and stakes of the church now - and what it will take for us to get there!

The last of these requirements, to care for the poor and needy, is one of the primary results of us becoming self-reliant. Self-reliance isn't just im-

portant to us personally, it is important in our efforts to serve and save others, and specifically to eliminate poverty and create a Zion community.

I would like to focus on one of the other requirements given by Elder Christopherson - to become, individually and collectively, a Holy people. This sounds desirable, but what does it mean? The bible dictionary tells us that a "holy people" initially meant those who had a special relationship with God. Because what distinguished God the Father from heathen gods was His personal character, the word "holy" came to mean a person of high moral character, one who was good in a moral and religious way. If we want to become, individually and collectively, a Holy people, then we need to both develop a special relationship with God and become like Him, that is, to develop a high moral character.

Elder Bednar gave a talk once (BYU-Idaho; 2003; "The Character of Christ"), wherein he quoted Neal A. Maxwell as saying that "**There would have been no Atonement except for the character of Christ**". This statement intrigued Elder Bednar and he decided to study what character meant and specifically what character Christ had.

Character is "...the sum of the moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual...". We don't have time to dive into the scriptures to fully understand Christ's character, but a good place to start, if you are interested, is Chapter 6 of "Preach My Gospel", written to the missionary (and member) who asks the question "How do I develop Christ-like attributes?". This chapter lists 9 attributes:

1. Faith.
2. Hope.
3. Charity.
4. Virtue.
5. Knowledge.
6. Patience.
7. Humility.
8. Diligence.
9. Obedience.

You will find, if you pursue a study of self-reliance, that you will learn more about each of these Christ-like attributes in the My Foundation course.

There is an interesting relationship between living the gospel and developing a Christ-like character which is given in Moroni 8:25-26: "25 And the

first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins; 26 And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God".

Elder Bednar discussed one characteristic of Christ that he thought was very important - the ability to turn outward during times of stress and trouble, rather than inward. He said: "Perhaps the greatest indicator of character is the capacity to recognize and appropriately respond to other people who are experiencing the very challenge or adversity that is most immediately and forcefully pressing upon us. Character is revealed, for example, in the power to discern the suffering of other people when we ourselves are suffering; in the ability to detect the hunger of others when we are hungry; and in the power to reach out and extend compassion for the spiritual agony of others when we are in the midst of our own spiritual distress. Thus, character is demonstrated by looking and reaching outward when the natural and instinctive response is to be self-absorbed and turn inward. If such a capacity is indeed the ultimate criterion of moral character, then the Savior of the world is the perfect example of such a consistent and charitable character".

There are many times in the New Testament where this characteristic of Christ is demonstrated. However, Elder Bednar pointed out one that is somewhat hidden. Talk about Christ's experiences being tempted by Satan, and then what is contained in Matthew 4:11 - read it as written in the NT: "Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him".

Now it seems reasonable that Christ, who was no doubt physically weak after 40 days of fasting and spiritually exhausted after contending with Satan, would be visited, comforted and strengthened by angels. However, let us read what is said in Joseph's inspired translation of the bible:

"...and now Jesus knew that John was cast into prison, and he sent angels, and, behold, they came and ministered unto him (John)". (Acc. to JST MS. 1, p. 7.)

Elder Bednar says: "...the additions found in the Joseph Smith translation completely change our understanding of this event. Angels did not come and minister to the Savior; rather, the Savior, in His own state of spiritual, mental, and physical distress, sent angels to minister to John. Brothers and sisters, it is important for us to recognize that Jesus in the midst of His own challenge recognized and appropriately responded to John--who was ex-

periencing a similar but lesser challenge than that of the Savior's. Thus, the character of Christ is manifested as He reached outward and ministered to one who was suffering--even as He himself was experiencing anguish and torment...".

Brothers and Sisters - I am nowhere near behaving in this manner. In fact, I am so far from it that it is embarrassing. However, when I listen to Elder Bednar's talk, the Spirit forcefully witnesses to me that I need to both understand this aspect of Christ's character and to develop it in myself, as best as I am able. You may feel, as I did, that this would be a huge change in my (or your) life and would require sustained effort over a period of time to accomplish, and that would be an understatement. But it is a necessary step in each of our lives to come unto Christ, to be converted to Christ, to become like Christ, in whatever way is necessary for us individually. And if the Spirit so whispers to us, then who are we to ignore God?

3 Nephi 27:21, 27 - "Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do...

....Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am".

It is my prayer that each of us will be sensitive to the Spirit on our journey to spiritual self-reliance, and that we will exercise our faith in Christ by following the Spirit's promptings and doing that which will bring us unto our Saviour.