

The Gift of Grace
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On Easter Sunday we celebrate the most long-awaited and glorious event in the history of the world.

It is the day that changed everything.
On that day, my life changed.
Your life changed.
The destiny of all God's children changed.

On that blessed day, the Savior of mankind, who had taken upon Himself the chains of sin and death that held us captive, burst those chains and set us free.

Because of the sacrifice of our beloved Redeemer, death has no sting, the grave has no victory,¹ Satan has no lasting power, and we are "begotten ... again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."²

Truly, the Apostle Paul was correct when he said we can "comfort one another with these words."³

God's Grace

We often speak of the Savior's Atonement—and rightly so!

In Jacob's words, "Why not speak of the atonement of Christ, and attain to a perfect knowledge of him?"⁴ But as "we talk of Christ, ... rejoice in Christ, ... preach of Christ, [and] prophesy of Christ"⁵ at every opportunity, we must never lose our sense of awe and profound gratitude for the eternal sacrifice of the Son of God.

The Savior's Atonement cannot become commonplace in our teaching, in our conversation, or in our hearts. It is sacred and holy, for it was through this "great and last sacrifice" that Jesus the Christ brought "salvation to all those who shall believe on his name."⁶

I marvel to think that the Son of God would condescend to save us, as imperfect, impure, mistake-prone, and ungrateful as we often are. I have tried to understand the Savior's Atonement with my finite mind, and the only explanation I can come up with is this: God loves us deeply, perfectly, and everlastingly. I cannot even begin to estimate "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ... [of] the love of Christ."⁷

A powerful expression of that love is what the scriptures often call the grace of God—the divine

assistance and endowment of strength by which we grow from the flawed and limited beings we are now into exalted beings of "truth and light, until [we are] glorified in truth and [know] all things."⁸

It is a most wondrous thing, this grace of God. Yet it is often misunderstood.⁹ Even so, we should know about God's grace if we intend to inherit what has been prepared for us in His eternal kingdom.

To that end I would like to speak of grace. In particular, first, how grace unlocks the gates of heaven and, second, how it opens the windows of heaven.

First: Grace Unlocks the Gates of Heaven

Because we have all "sinned, and come short of the glory of God"¹⁰ and because "there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God,"¹¹ every one of us is unworthy to return to God's presence.

Even if we were to serve God with our whole souls, it is not enough, for we would still be "unprofitable servants."¹² We cannot earn our way into heaven; the demands of justice stand as a barrier, which we are powerless to overcome on our own.

But all is not lost.
The grace of God is our great and everlasting hope.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the plan of mercy appeases the demands of justice¹³ "and [brings] about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance."¹⁴

Our sins, though they may be as scarlet, can become white as snow.¹⁵ Because our beloved Savior "gave himself a ransom for all,"¹⁶ an entrance into His everlasting kingdom is provided unto us.¹⁷

The gate is unlocked!
But the grace of God does not merely restore us to our previous innocent state. If salvation means only erasing our mistakes and sins, then salvation—as wonderful as it is—does not fulfill the Father's aspirations for us. His aim is much higher: He wants His sons and daughters to become like Him.

With the gift of God's grace, the path of discipleship does not lead backward; it leads upward.

It leads to heights we can scarcely comprehend! It leads to exaltation in the celestial kingdom of our Heavenly Father, where we, surrounded by our loved

ones, receive “of his fulness, and of his glory.”¹⁸ All things are ours, and we are Christ’s.¹⁹ Indeed, all that the Father hath shall be given unto us.²⁰

To inherit this glory, we need more than an unlocked gate; we must enter through this gate with a heart’s desire to be changed—a change so dramatic that the scriptures describe it as being “born again; yea, born of God, changed from [our worldly] and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters.”²¹

Second: Grace Opens the Windows of Heaven

Another element of God’s grace is the opening of the windows of heaven, through which God pours out blessings of power and strength, enabling us to achieve things that otherwise would be far beyond our reach. It is by God’s amazing grace that His children can overcome the undercurrents and quicksands of the deceiver, rise above sin, and “be perfect[ed] in Christ.”²²

Though we all have weaknesses, we can overcome them. Indeed it is by the grace of God that, if we humble ourselves and have faith, weak things can become strong.²³

Throughout our lives, God’s grace bestows temporal blessings and spiritual gifts that magnify our abilities and enrich our lives. His grace refines us. His grace helps us become our best selves.

Who Can Qualify?

In the Bible we read of Christ’s visit to the home of Simon the Pharisee.

Outwardly, Simon seemed to be a good and upright man. He regularly checked off his to-do list of religious obligations: he kept the law, paid his tithing, observed the Sabbath, prayed daily, and went to the synagogue.

But while Jesus was with Simon, a woman approached, washed the Savior’s feet with her tears, and anointed His feet with fine oil.

Simon was not pleased with this display of worship, for he knew that this woman was a sinner. Simon thought that if Jesus didn’t know this, He must not be a prophet or He would not have let the woman touch him.

Perceiving his thoughts, Jesus turned to Simon and asked a question. “There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: ... one owed five hundred pence, ... the other fifty.

“And when they [both] had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?”

Simon answered that it was the one who was forgiven the most.

Then Jesus taught a profound lesson: “Seest thou this woman? ... Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.”²⁴

Which of these two people are we most like?

Are we like Simon? Are we confident and comfortable in our good deeds, trusting in our own righteousness? Are we perhaps a little impatient with those who are not living up to our standards? Are we on autopilot, going through the motions, attending our meetings, yawning through Gospel Doctrine class, and perhaps checking our cell phones during sacrament service?

Or are we like this woman, who thought she was completely and hopelessly lost because of sin?

Do we love much?

Do we understand our indebtedness to Heavenly Father and plead with all our souls for the grace of God?

When we kneel to pray, is it to replay the greatest hits of our own righteousness, or is it to confess our faults, plead for God’s mercy, and shed tears of gratitude for the amazing plan of redemption?²⁵

Salvation cannot be bought with the currency of obedience; it is purchased by the blood of the Son of God.²⁶ Thinking that we can trade our good works for salvation is like buying a plane ticket and then supposing we own the airline. Or thinking that after paying rent for our home, we now hold title to the entire planet earth.

Why Then Obey?

If grace is a gift of God, why then is obedience to God’s commandments so important? Why bother with God’s commandments—or repentance, for that matter? Why not just admit we’re sinful and let God save us?

Or, to put the question in Paul’s words, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” Paul’s answer is simple and clear: “God forbid.”²⁷

Brothers and sisters, we obey the commandments of God—out of love for Him!

Trying to understand God’s gift of grace with all our heart and mind gives us all the more reasons to love and obey our Heavenly Father with meekness and gratitude. As we walk the path of discipleship, it

refines us, it improves us, it helps us to become more like Him, and it leads us back to His presence. “The Spirit of the Lord [our God]” brings about such “a mighty change in us, . . . that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.”²⁸

Therefore, our obedience to God’s commandments comes as a natural outgrowth of our endless love and gratitude for the goodness of God. This form of genuine love and gratitude will miraculously merge our works with God’s grace. Virtue will garnish our thoughts unceasingly, and our confidence will wax strong in the presence of God.²⁹

Dear brothers and sisters, living the gospel faithfully is not a burden. It is a joyful rehearsal—a preparation for inheriting the grand glory of the eternities. We seek to obey our Heavenly Father because our spirits will become more attuned to spiritual things. Vistas are opened that we never knew existed. Enlightenment and understanding come to us when we do the will of the Father.³⁰

Grace is a gift of God, and our desire to be obedient to each of God’s commandments is the reaching out of our mortal hand to receive this sacred gift from our Heavenly Father.

All We Can Do

The prophet Nephi made an important contribution to our understanding of God’s grace when he declared, “We labor diligently . . . to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.”³¹

However, I wonder if sometimes we misinterpret the phrase “after all we can do.” We must understand that “after” does not equal “because.”

We are not saved “because” of all that we can do. Have any of us done all that we can do? Does God

wait until we’ve expended every effort before He will intervene in our lives with His saving grace?

Many people feel discouraged because they constantly fall short. They know firsthand that “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”³² They raise their voices with Nephi in proclaiming, “My soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.”³³

I am certain Nephi knew that the Savior’s grace allows and enables us to overcome sin.³⁴ This is why Nephi labored so diligently to persuade his children and brethren “to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God.”³⁵

After all, that is what we can do! And that is our task in mortality!

Grace Is Available to All

When I think of what the Savior did for us leading up to that first Easter Sunday, I want to lift up my voice and shout praises to the Most High God and His Son, Jesus Christ!

The gates of heaven are unlocked!
The windows of heaven are opened!
Today and forevermore God’s grace is available to all whose hearts are broken and whose spirits are contrite.³⁶ Jesus Christ has cleared the way for us to ascend to heights incomprehensible to mortal minds.³⁷

I pray that we will see with new eyes and a new heart the eternal significance of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice. I pray that we will show our love for God and our gratitude for the gift of God’s infinite grace by keeping His commandments and joyfully “walk[ing] in [a] newness of life.”³⁸ In the sacred name of our Master and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, amen.