

The Atonement not just for Sinners

Mike Baird
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Cooper Mt Ward

Introduction

- I have had this topic on my mind for weeks
- At the 1st Presidency Christmas devotional two thoughts expressed by President Hinckley touched me as relating to my topic:
 - Gordon B Hinckley:
"On that night of nights, the great plan of the Almighty was unrolled as a scroll" (Christmas Devotional 2003)
 - Gordon B Hinckley:
"I am convinced my brethren and Sisters none of us fully understand the magnitude of the Atonement of Jesus Christ" (Christmas Devotional 2003)

For unto us a child is born – God with us

- These verses as put to song has been running through my mind:
- Isaiah 9:6
"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"
- In the New Testament we read of the birth of Jesus
- It was as foretold
 - Alma 7:10 (Alma)
"he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God"
- Son of God
 - Mathew 1:18-23 (Angel to Joseph before birth)
"for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost....
Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, *God with us.*"
- It is very clear that not just a man was born but a God, the only begotten Son of the Father

Power to be more than just a teacher and good example

- Satan, however, would have us believe him nothing more than a philosopher, a good man
 - I've had friends say
 - Change the focus from his divine birth to other things (commercialism)
- A major significance of his birth is that by virtue of his birth he had power to consummate the Atonement and to lay down his life and rise again
- While we as latter day saints believe him to be the Son of God, I am convinced that the full implications of what we are saying doesn't quite sink in sometimes
 - Limited because we don't move our understanding from our head to our heart
 - Don't really internalize
 - We are sometimes like the lady I read about who was paralyzed with bitterness after a divorce and didn't know how to overcome it
 - She read Matt 11:28-30 for Primary presentation – Sunk in when she was reading it aloud
 - Matt 11:28-30
 - "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
 - Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
 - For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"
 - "Bishop, sometimes that is the longest distance in the world"
 - Limited by our view that the atonement is applicable only for when we have sinned
 - Some think then only when big time
- Sometimes we trivialize our relationship with Christ
 - Bring him down to us instead of allowing him lifting us up to him
 - Elder brother
 - While true in the same sense we all are brothers and sisters it is not the most important relationship nor should it be our primary focus
 - Primary relationships
 - Savior, redeemer, advocate with the Father, exemplar
 - We are made new creatures in him and become sons and daughters to him
 - These are all things Satan would have us believe or do
 - Limit what the Savior can do by encouraging a limited view and understanding

- Robert Millet
"All too often, however, my actions have betrayed my limited orientation, my vision of Christ as a type of spiritual adviser, a sort of celestial cheerleader who stands on the sidelines and whispers encouragement, but not the Lord God Omnipotent who came to earth to make men and women into new creatures through empowering them to do what they could never do for themselves." (Selected Writings of Robert L. Millet: Gospel Scholars Series, 499)
- Of significance of the birth we celebrate this week
 - He is not just some man, just a spiritual advisor
 - He was and is Immanuel - "God with us"

Christ descended below all so that he could comprehend

- By virtue of his birth as Son of God and with power given him from God he was able to descend below all things
 - Let's think what that means
- Think of your worst day ever.
 - Tell someone - you can't understand how I feel
 - Teenagers – parents you just don't understand
 - Shellie: "Dad, you don't understand, I feel sick"
 - But I did, I too have felt so sick I really didn't care much
- D&C 88:6
"He that ascended up on high, as also he *descended below all things*, in that he *comprehended all things*"
 - He comprehends all things!
 - Like I did with Shellie
 - Told Joseph Smith the same thing
 - D&C 122:5-8
" The Son of Man hath *descended below them all* "

- Alma 7:13 (Alma the Younger)
"Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God *suffereth according to the flesh* that he might take upon him the sins of his people... "
- Even though through the Spirit he could have understood all things, for some reason I don't completely understand he suffered in the flesh
- Wasn't a virtual experiences like some movie we watch
- Wasn't a taste here or there

Suffering covered the whole spectrum

- sin
- unrelated to transgression
- incident to temptation

Suffering for sin

- Isaiah 53:5
"he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities"
- 3 Nephi 11:11 (Savior to Nephites)
"I...have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world"
- 1 Peter 3:18
"Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God"
- *All* transgressions:
 - knowingly, unknowingly and those not accountable for actions

Suffering unrelated to sin or transgression

- Isaiah 53:3-4
"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief...
Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows"
- 2 Nephi 9:21 (Jacob)
"he suffereth the *pains* of all men, yea, the *pains* of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam"
- Mosiah 3:5,7 (King Benjamin)
"he shall suffer temptations, and *pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer*"

Suffering incident to Temptation

- Suffered every kind of temptation
 - Alma 7:11-12 (Alma the Younger)
"And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and *temptations of every kind*;"
 - Mosiah 3:7 (King Benjamin)
"*he shall suffer temptations*, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer "
- Suffered Temptations but did not yield
 - Hebrews 4:15 (Paul)
"but *was in all points tempted* like as we are, yet without sin."
 - Mosiah 15:5 (Abinadi)
"And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, *suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation*"
 - D&C 20:22
"He suffered temptations but gave no heed unto them"

Awful arithmetic of the Atonement

- Contemplating all these sufferings:
 - Neal Maxwell:
"All our infirmities and sicknesses were somehow, too, a part of the awful arithmetic of the Atonement" (Willing to Submit," Ensign, May 1985, 70)
 - Neal Maxwell:
"In ways we cannot comprehend, our sicknesses and infirmities were borne by Him even before they were borne by us.
...The very weight of our combined sins caused Him to descend below all.
" (Even As I Am, pp. 116-17)
- Because he descended below all we cannot say "but you don't understand"
 - Ezra Taft Benson:
"there is no human condition—be it suffering, incapacity, inadequacy, mental deficiency, or sin—that He cannot comprehend" (Come Unto Christ, pg 132)
 - Neal Maxwell:
"Can we, even in the depths of disease, tell Him anything at all about suffering?
... We have never been, nor will we be, in depths such as He has known.
Thus His atonement made perfect His empathy and His mercy and His

capacity to succor us, for which we can be everlastingly grateful as He tutors us in our trials." (Even As I Am, pp. 116-17)

- D&C 88:6

"He that ascended up on high, as also he *descended below all things*, in that he comprehended all things"

Atonement not just for Sinners

- With this understanding that Christ not only suffered for sins and temptations but also for things unrelated to sin
- Look at what this means to us in 4 ways
 - Beauty for ashes
 - Sweeten the bitter
 - Succor when tempted
 - Strength when weary

Beauty for ashes

- Symbolism of ashes
 - My mind's eye view is of people poking through the ashes of a burned home
 - Farakis Family – Lived in my parents ward, Christmas 1977 their house burned down ("Thirteen Wards," Ensign, Feb. 1979, 5)
 - We all at times are like people poking through the ashes
 - There are many things that leave us only ashes
- Isaiah 61:1-3

"to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness"

 - This scripture portrays the Atonement as not just for sinners
 - Bruce Hafen (1st Quorum of 70):
"The Savior's atonement is thus portrayed as the healing power not only for sin, but also for carelessness, inadequacy, and all mortal bitterness. **The Atonement is not just for sinners.**" (Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ," Ensign, Apr. 1990, pg 7.)
- Alma 7:11-12 (Alma the Younger)

"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."

- Robert Millet:
"To put it simply, the Atonement does more than fix the mistakes. It does more than balance the scales. It even does more than forgive our sins. It rehabilitates regenerates, renews, and transforms human nature." (Grace Works. pg 95)
- Farakis home rebuilt
 - Dad was put in charge
 - I personally did lots of work
 - June 1978 – literally Beauty for ashes when they moved into their new home
 - Savior – provides beauty for ashes in our lives

Sweeten the Bitter

- Tasting the bitter is a deliberate part of life
 - Moses 6:55 (Lord to Adam)
"and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good"
- Source of bitterness (Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ," Ensign, Apr. 1990, pg 7.):
 - Sin
 - One end of the spectrum
 - Our fault
 - Adversity
 - Other end of the spectrum
 - no fault of our own
 - The man whose brakes on his truck failed
 - Unwise choices, hasty judgments, mistakes, disappointments
 - In between ends of the spectrum
 - some degree of fault
 - Bruce Hafen:
"The Atonement can heal the effects of tasting all of this bitterness. This healing power cleanses our spirits, upon condition of repentance, when our souls are soiled with sin. It can also compensate, "after all we can do," not only for the consequences of our sins, but also for the harmful effects of our ignorance and neglect." (Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ," Ensign, Apr. 1990, pg 7.)

- "I don't think I can do this, it hurts too much and it is too hard"
 - Give what hurts away to the Savior – he understands and can sweeten the bitter

Succor when tempted

- Succor: relief, aid, help
- Hebrews 2:18
"For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted"
- D&C 62:1
"Behold, and hearken, O ye elders of my church, saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, your advocate, who knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted"
- Perhaps we feel there are temptations we cannot overcome?
- Savior – succor us when we are sorely tempted

Strength when weary

- "I just can't do this"
- Isaiah 40:28-31
"Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard...
He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength...
the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint"
- When we look around us at Sister X or Brother Y and know what bitterness they have tasted, what ashes they have contemplated and yet we see peace and testimony, know they have given the bitterness up and received beauty for ashes through the Atonement

Closing

- Luke 2:10

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

 - The message of Christmas – tidings of great joy
 - hope of remission of sins
 - hope of resurrection
 - hope of succor
- Why?

Luke 2:11

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord"
- Birth of Christ an expression of God's love for us
 - John 3:16

" For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"
 - Christ so loved us that he such that he "descended below all" such that his suffering as he said
 - D&C 19:18

"... caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink"
 - He did this so that he might draw us to him and succor us to
- Isaiah 61:1-4

... to preach good tidings unto the meek;
... bind up the brokenhearted
... to proclaim liberty to the captives
... opening of the prison to them that are bound;
... to comfort all that mourn;
... the oil of joy for mourning"
... to give unto them beauty for ashes