

A Mighty Change of Heart (<http://mightychangeofheart.com>)

"And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" Alma 5:14

Chapter 19 – Opposition And Praise

CHAPTER 19

OPPOSITION AND PRAISE

“By him therefore let us offer the SACRIFICE OF PRAISE TO GOD continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.”¹¹ (Heb 13:15)

Anyone who embarks on the path that has been suggested in the previous chapters is going to run into some stiff opposition, but the experience that you gain will be priceless. Great orators always speak from experience. One reason they are so interesting and compelling is that they have experienced what they are talking about. They feel every part of the speech or sermon. They have lived the very thing in which they are talking about. You can talk theory all day and never gain a listener, but when you are capable of talking from personal experience the whole scene changes.

Since before the creation of this earth some have obeyed truth and some have obeyed error. Satan took it upon himself to oppose God’s plan. Others supported God’s plan. Thus we found ourselves in a system of constant conflict. Do I follow Satan into the paths of wickedness or do I follow the Lord into the paths of holiness? When we finally make a commitment to the Lord that we will follow Him, the battle becomes extremely interesting. Satan gets angry and sends some of his most evil troops into the battle. You may lose some of the battles, but it is important that you don’t lose the war. It is important that you don’t surrender, that you keep fighting, that you endure to the end. The reason the atonement and repentance were provided is because the Lord knew that we would lose some of the battles. The Lord is the only one that won all the battles.

Why is it that we are in this system of opposition? Lehi taught as follows:

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so...righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. (II Nephi 2:11)

Apparently opposition is the catalyst that strengthens the individual. When we oppose Satan then we grow toward the Lord, but when we oppose the Lord, then we regress toward Satan.

There is one thing that we must understand. God is our Heavenly Father. He knows exactly what is best for each of us, His children. If we want to get back into God’s presence, He will put us through the process necessary to get us there. If we don’t, we are left much to our own way of thinking. If we had that kind of

insight as earthly parents, we wouldn't make so many blunders in the rearing of our own children.

When we really get to the point of believing that our Heavenly Father knows what is best for us then we can break through into the realms of faith and hope. We know He will give us the experiences which will prepare us to come back and dwell with Him. Those experiences are not all going to be happy ones. He knows that within each of us there are character traits that have to be taken out of us. But He has promised,

Therefore, let your hearts be comforted; for all things shall work together FOR GOOD to them that WALK UPRIGHTLY, and to the sanctification of the church. (D&C 105:15)

Paul expressed it this way:

And we know that ALL THINGS work together FOR GOOD to them that LOVE GOD, to them who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

The Lord elaborated on this even further to the Prophet Joseph Smith.

If thou art accused with all manner of false accusations; if thine enemies fall upon thee; if they tear thee from the society of thy father and mother and brethren and sisters; and if with a drawn sword thine enemies tear thee from the bosom of thy wife, and of thine offspring....

And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee.... if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, MY SON THAT ALL THESE THINGS SHALL GIVE THEE EXPERIENCE, AND SHALL BE FOR THY GOOD. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?

(D&C 122:5-8)

Very few have suffered as Joseph Smith did, but the Lord reminded him that it was for his good. Now that is hard doctrine. Sometimes we wonder if the suffering will ever end. Peter reminds us,

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you:

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are PARTAKERS OF CHRIST'S SUFFERING; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be GLAD also with exceeding joy. (1 Peter 4:12,13)

It is extremely difficult to rejoice in suffering. It is like a child who has had a belt taken to him turning to the one who administered the punishment and saying, sincerely, "Thanks, I needed that." You haven't heard of that happening, have you? Why? Because the child is not convinced that the person who administered the punishment was doing it for the child's own good. That is the very same reason we don't thank, rejoice and praise the Lord for adversity when we are called to experience it. We don't trust God. We don't believe that He knows exactly what is best for us so we develop a spirit of rebellion. Sometimes it gets so bad people blame God for their problems, curse Him and die spiritually. But what have we just learned? What has the Lord told us?

And he who receiveth ALL THINGS WITH THANKFULNESS SHALL BE MADE GLORIOUS; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more. (D&C 78:19)

That's quite a promise, isn't it? But we have to be thankful for the adversity and suffering that this life brings as well as the blessings. When we get ourselves into a state of rejoicing and thankfulness, then we will be about ready for the next step. This is one that seems almost unreasonable, but it is based on the idea that the

Lord knows just exactly what is best for each of His children. What is it then? It is called “praise”. This is perhaps the hardest. It means simply to express thanks and praise to God for the whole complicated problem, whatever it might be. Paul called it a sacrifice.

By him therefore let us offer the SACRIFICE OF PRAISE to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. (Heb 13:15)

Do you begin to see why it is a sacrifice? Most of us would find it easier to double our tithing or fast offerings, or both, than to go before the Lord and give him thanks and praise for an extremely difficult situation. Yet that is exactly what He expects us to do. He wants us to acknowledge to Him, “Father, you did the right thing. You did what was best for all concerned.” It is difficult to do that while going through the suffering, but oftentimes we come to that condition after the adversity has passed and admit it to ourselves. But even then we find it difficult to admit it to our Heavenly Father. We just don’t like to admit that He knows what is best for us. To go to Him and praise Him for a bad situation is almost beyond belief. However, that is what the Lord expects us to do. Do you think that our loving Heavenly Father would allow one thing to happen to us that would not be for our good?

What does the Lord expect us to do in a difficult situation? First, He wants us to acknowledge His hand in the situation. He said to the Prophet Joseph Smith,

And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who obey not his commandments and CONFESS NOT HIS HAND IN ALL THINGS. (D&C 59:21)

Second, He wants us to be thankful and give Him honor and praise even in the difficult situations of life because He knows what is best for us. Yes, every trial, tribulation, heartache and sorrow is designed to purify. King Benjamin’s angelic message told us,

For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, SUBMISSIVE, MEEK, HUMBLE, PATIENT, FULL OF LOVE, willing to SUBMIT to all things which the Lord seeth fit to INFLICT upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

Paul, the Apostle, was one that not only understood this doctrine, he experienced the doctrine. While in the city of Thyatira there was a damsel possessed with the spirit of divination that was making her masters much money. She followed Paul around harassing him and testifying that he was a servant of the Most High and that he was showing the way of salvation. Even though she was testifying the truth, Paul discerned that this was an evil spirit so he cast the spirit out. This put the damsel’s masters out of business and made them very unhappy.

And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers.

And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

And the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.

And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:

Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. (Acts 16:19-24)

How did Paul and Silas react to this difficult situation? The normal reaction would be one of discouragement and total frustration. How were they going to get to Macedonia now? Why didn't the Lord warn them? After all, were they not in the service of the Master? Why did the Lord allow this to happen to them? Doubt and fear could have taken hold of them and they could have complained bitterly to the Lord, but they were men of faith and they did not complain against the Lord. Even in a Roman prison they did not resort to that, but there was something that they did do. Now remember, they were beaten before they were thrown into prison and their feet were fast in the stocks. They couldn't move around, but they decided to hold a prayer service. The time was midnight. The rest of the prisoners were asleep. Can you imagine what kind of a stir that would cause? Paul and Silas didn't seem to care.

And at midnight Paul and Silas PRAYED, and SANG PRAISES unto God: and the prisoners heard them. (Acts 16:25)

They probably didn't feel like praying and singing praises to God, but that is what they did. They trusted the Lord even then. They knew that the Lord had done what was best for them even if it was to put them in prison. How did the Lord react to the songs of praise and prayer?

And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bands were loosed. (Acts 16:26)

What do you think would have happened if Paul and Silas had complained to the Lord? Probably nothing. That is about as much as the Lord does for us when we sink into the depths of despair because of a difficult problem.

The doors of the prison were now open. They were loosed from the stocks. What an opportunity to escape, but they didn't. They just continued the prayer meeting and invited the jailor to participate.

And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. (Acts 16:27-33)

What do we learn from the above account?

Our Heavenly Father KNOWS WHAT IS BEST FOR ALL OF US;

BE THANKFUL FOR DIFFICULTIES;

PRAISE GOD FOR ADVERSITY; and

TRUST HIM.

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