

# Repentance

Sacrament Meeting Talk

By Cameron Ford 2013

The principle of repentance has been the central theme of God's prophets from the beginning of time. When Christ came it was also the centerpiece of his teachings. According to Matthew 4: 17, from the moment that Christ began his ministry he "...began to preach, and say , Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand".

Repentance can be defined as the process of overcoming the natural man by aligning our thoughts and actions with the will of God. King Benjamin tells us that the natural man will kick, scream, and fight against this process; in Mosiah 3:19 he says: "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..." So how do we utilize the atonement to "put off the natural man"? It is the weekly, daily, hour by hour, and minute by minute process that we know as the repentance process. I believe that the entire purpose of revealed religion, in all of its aspects, is to help mankind to learn how to do this one thing: to repent and align ourselves with the will of God. And the central element in gaining full access to the power of the atonement is the act of prayer; that critical and deeply personal relationship that is formed when we speak to our Heavenly Father. My focus today will be to use a couple of concepts from the Holy Temple to teach us how to be endowed with the true power of prayer. I believe that one of the main points the Lord is trying to teach us in the temple endowment is how to live our lives so that our prayers will be answered. Whenever we bow our heads, whenever we kneel down, we are

approaching that veil that separates us from God. How we approach that veil makes all the difference.

First I would like to further discuss for a moment the significance of the atonement in overcoming the natural man. From the book of Genesis we learn that after Adam and Eve fell by partaking of the forbidden fruit, they made themselves aprons made of fig leaves. This apron of fig leaves symbolically represents the fall of mankind when man became “carnal, sensual, and devilish”(Moses 5:13). It is interesting to note that the Genesis account also states that immediately after the fall Jehovah himself made Adam and Eve coats of skins to wear. I think it is significant that the coat was made by Jehovah, who we know later came into mortality as the Savior to redeem mankind by performing the atonement. So it seems clear that just as the apron of fig leaves represents the fall, the coat of skins symbolically represents the act that Jehovah would perform to redeem Adam and Eve and their posterity from the fall. Isn't that a beautiful and comforting thought: Adam was given the privilege of constantly wearing a symbol of the atonement that Jehovah worked out? And it perfectly matches King Benjamin's description of needing the atonement made by Christ to overcome the natural man created by the fall. But how do we access the power of the atonement? Once again, it is by approaching the throne of God on our knees.

Have you ever struggled to say meaningful prayers? Have you sometimes felt that your prayers make it no further than the ceiling because your heart just isn't in it? I know I have. But I have also had prayers that touched me to my core. So how do we have consistent, sincere, heartfelt prayer that grants us access to the power of the atonement? How do we pray in a way that not

only gains us forgiveness, but gives us the power to consistently conquer the natural man?

*Again*, we can look to the life of Adam for an answer. When he was driven from the Garden of Eden, he was commanded to make sacrifices unto God. We know that these sacrifices were symbolic of the sacrifice that Christ was to eventually make, but it was also because sacrifices made unto God, when performed with the humility and meekness of a child, always bring the Holy Ghost upon the person making the sacrifice; and the Holy Ghost is the key ingredient in being able to align our wills with the will of God.

The important concept here is that the Holy Spirit gives us the power not only to say meaningful prayers that produce forgiveness, but to know what things to ask for in our prayers. In D&C 50: 29-30 it says: “And if ye are purified and cleansed from sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done. But know this, **it shall be given you what you shall ask.**” Wouldn’t that be wonderful, knowing that our prayers will always be answered because we are always asking for the right things?

The account in Genesis of Cain teaches us that it is not the sacrifice itself that is the most important in gaining the Holy Ghost; but that it is the attitude in which we offer the sacrifice that really matters. Cain’s offering was rejected by God not because it was not a good sacrifice, but because it was Satan that inspired him to offer it. Later on Christ emphasized the central importance of performing sacrifices with the meekness and humility of a child by commanding that the practice of animal sacrifice should be replaced by a new sacrifice. In 3 Ne 9:20 Christ says: “And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit [in other words, true recognition and sorrow for our weaknesses and shortcomings]. And whoso cometh

unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost." And he later said to the Nephites: "And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and become as a little child."

It is interesting to note that both King Benjamin and Christ focus on becoming as a child as a key part of the repentance process. After describing that the atonement is necessary to overcome the natural man, King Benjamin describes what is necessary to gain the true power of the atonement. In the continuation of Mosiah 3:19 he says: "...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."

This connection between sacrifice and becoming as a child is further emphasized by a series of scriptures in the New Testament. In Mark 10: 13-16, Christ rebukes his disciples for keeping children away from him and says: "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." Immediately after saying this, in Mark 10:17-23 the account is given of the rich young man who was invited to sell all of his property and follow the Savior. I do not believe the ordering of these two experiences in the scriptures is a coincidence. There is a real connection between becoming as a child and making the kind of sacrifice that was asked of this rich young man. Many have thought that this was a specific test just for this young man. However, I think it is clear that this is a kind of test that all of us are asked to go through.

Indulge me for a moment while I modify this scriptural account to illustrate what I mean. For convenience I will use my daughter's name in the account, but when I say her name I want you to replace her name with your own name.

“And when he[Christ] was gone forth in the way, there came [insert your name] running, and kneeled to him and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto [her]... Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and thy mother. And [she] answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding [her] loved [her], and said unto [her], One thing thou lackest: go thy way [and enter into my Holy Temple and covenant with me that you will dedicate your life and everything you have to my purposes, holding nothing back], and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.”

I believe that for all of us, the temple endowment is essentially the same invitation that was given to the rich young man. The specifics that the Lord may ask us to do may be different, but the sacrifice requested will always be just as great. The great question of our lives is how we will respond to the Saviors invitation. Will we willingly accept difficult callings, serve missions, send our children on missions, serve our neighbors, dedicate our resources to the benefit of others, and wear ourselves out in the service of the Master? Or will we go “away grieving” because our personal time is too precious and our possessions are too great? Will we suffer through illness, disease, heartache, and financial hardships with the humility of a child, or will

we allow these things to create a divide between ourselves and the Master? Everyone's test is lovingly individualized by the Master, but none may escape the need to submit to this test to enter into the presence of the Lord. Just as the rich young man, everyone's test will focus on their weak points, on their shortcomings. On the outside, some people's test may appear to be more difficult than others, but I believe they will all be just as hard. And I have absolute confidence in God's judgment; he will require us to go through no more, or less, than is needed.

So how do we have meaningful prayers that will gain us full access to the power of the atonement? By submitting ourselves to God, entering into his Holy Temple, and striving to keep the covenants we have made there. But 'Brother Ford', you may say, 'this sounds like an unsolvable paradox. How can I get the motivation to give my life to God if I can't even get the motivation to say meaningful prayers?' The answer is that it is a never ending cycle that is all made possible by the Holy Ghost. We start on the small things, and every step we take towards God allows him to give us the power of the Holy Ghost to give us the motivation to take another step. And so on. If we will stand in Holy places such as serving in our callings, reading the scriptures, praying, fasting, going to church, going to the temple, listening to uplifting music, or any number of good things, the Holy Ghost will come to us and give us the power to do more.

A few years ago I felt that I was stuck in a spiritual slump. I was having a difficult time getting the motivation to continue trying to push the boulder called "conquering the natural man" further up the mountain. The mountain seemed to be getting steeper and steeper with every step. So, as some of you know, I decided to try an experiment inspired by Elder Scott of the

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. I decided to try going to the temple every week. My reasoning was that if I could consistently spend time in a place where the Holy Ghost is so strong, maybe it would seep into my bones and give me the strength to continue the climb. I can testify that so far this experiment has been a resounding success. I can point to three decisions in my life that I consider the most significant to the welfare of my soul. The first was my decision to serve a full time mission. That decision changed the course of my life. The second was to marry my wife in the Holy Temple. That decision has given me happiness beyond my ability to describe. And the third was to attend the Holy Temple weekly. That decision has allowed the power of the Holy Ghost to function in my life in a way that I have never experienced before.

Now, I know that all of us may not be in a situation where we can do what I am doing. Some may not have a temple recommend, others may have other obligations. But I could spend hours telling you why I think the temple is so important. It has so much to teach us if we are willing to put the time in to understand it. And I can assure you that the sacrifice is well worth the price; and it does take sacrifice, perhaps sacrifice of sleep, sacrifice of other interests, or sacrifice of bad habits. But, as we have discussed, sacrifice is always the price of admission into the presence of the Lord.

My final point is this: we will never truly conquer the natural man; we will never get the boulder to the top of the mountain. I can think of only 4 people in the history of the earth that have had the natural man completely removed while on this earth, and that would be John and the three Nephites. For all of the rest of us, we suffer with it until death. But the wonderful thing about the atonement is that it can redeem us without needing the natural man to be completely

gone. Christ's atonement makes us perfect without our needing to be perfect by ourselves. The only real requirement to access Christ's perfection is a "broken heart and a contrite spirit", a willingness to humbly submit our wills to the will of God. The real test is not how far up the mountain we push the boulder, or becoming perfect by getting the boulder to the top (which will never happen). The test is if we will humbly continue to try to push the boulder. We still pass the test if we never give up. When the weight of the boulder causes us to start to slide back, or if the boulder completely rolls over us; if we will pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and continue pushing again, that is all that the Lord requires.

I pray that we will all find the strength to continue pushing.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen