

Jerry Mean's Funeral Remarks

Bishop Cameron Ford, July 25, 2015

Why does our Heavenly Father allow so much seemingly unnecessary disease, pain, and suffering to come into the lives of His children? This is certainly one of the most difficult questions we come across in our journey through life. Many of the answers that are given are only partially satisfying, and how satisfying they are depends a great deal upon our perspective. As Latter-Day Saints, we believe that the purpose of life is to gain a body and to be tried and tested by the experiences of life to see what kind of people we really want to become. But looked at the wrong way, this can make Heavenly Father seem like an uncaring scientist running an experiment on lab rats. Our view of the test depends heavily on our understanding of the character of the one that setup the test. Happily, God has sent to the earth someone that is a perfect representation of His characteristics, namely Jesus Christ. From Christ's example we know that God is a caring, loving, and self sacrificing God that is willing to endure anything to allow His children to become what they choose to become. Even if that includes watching His children go through terrible heartache, pain, and suffering.

The true test of life is not to see if we can be perfect in all things, but it is to see which way we will choose to face and which direction we will choose to journey. Will the pattern of our lives be towards the good, the loving, and the uplifting, or towards the selfish, uncaring, and degrading? One of my favorite descriptions of this concept was given by the author Terryl Givens. He said:

"I am convinced that there must be grounds for doubt as well as belief in order to render the choice more truly a choice—and, therefore, the more deliberate and laden with personal vulnerability and investment. ... One is, it would seem, always provided with sufficient materials out of which to fashion a life of credible conviction or dismissive denial. We are acted upon, in other words, by appeals to our personal values, our yearnings, our fears, our appetites, and our egos. What we choose to embrace, to be responsive to, is the purest reflection of who we are and what we love." -Terryl Givens, *Lightning out of Heaven: Joseph*

Smith and the Forging of Community

I have come to love the analogy that the experiences of our lives are like the threads in a beautiful tapestry, and that God is the master weaver. If we will turn to Him, he can weave even our worst mistakes and darkest moments into a beautiful pattern. The Apostle Neil A. Maxwell describes this process powerfully in his poem entitled, "The Weaver".

My life is but a weaving
Between my Lord and me;
I cannot choose the colors
He worketh steadily.
Ofttimes He weaveth sorrow
And I in foolish pride,
Forget that He seeth the upper,
And I the under side.
Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver's skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

What kind of tapestry did Jerry Means weave with the Lord? Together with his eternal companion Joan, they wove a life of love and devotion. What kind of person did he choose to become through the often challenging and painful experiences of his life? I testify to you that he chose to be a disciple of his Savior Jesus Christ, and to model his life after Him. Most importantly, he chose to follow the Saviors example of drinking the bitter cup of life, without becoming bitter. Although I'm sure Jerry was not perfect, the pattern he followed in his life clearly demonstrated in which direction he faced. The last time I saw Brother Means alive, he taught me an incredibly powerful lesson. Although suffering though terrible pain as he lay in the hospital bed, he thanked me for coming to visit him and apologized that he was not being much of a conversationalist. I stood in awe at these gentle words even in his time of great suffering. Instead of viewing his life experiences with bitterness, Jerry used his time on earth to become meek and humble, to strive become more like his Savior. He viewed the last few years

of reprieve from cancer as a gift from God that allowed him to spend precious time with those he loved. As I have reflected on his life, it is clear to me that Jerry was one of the “noble and great ones” among all “the intelligences that were organized before the world was” that Abraham saw in his vision of the plan of salvation (Abraham 3:22).

Despite all of these answers, it does not change the pain that we feel when we lose someone dear to us like Brother Means. The Apostle Joseph B. Wirthlin spoke of his terrible pain at the loss of his wife. Of his wife he said:

“She was my strength and my joy. Because of her, I am a better man, husband, and father. ...I owe more to my wife than I can possibly express. ...When President Hinckley spoke at Sister Wirthlin’s funeral, he said that it is a devastating, consuming thing to lose someone you love. It gnaws at your soul. He was right. As Elsa was my greatest joy, now her passing is my greatest sorrow.” -Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, Sunday Will Come, Oct. 2006

But even this pain can be beautiful if seen in its true light. Elder Russell M. Nelson described this perfectly when he said:

“Mourning is one of the deepest expressions of pure love. ...we can’t fully appreciate joyful reunions later without tearful separations now. The only way to take sorrow out of death is to take love out of life.” -Elder Russell M. Nelson, Doors of Death, Apr, 1992

I testify that one of the main purposes of life is to learn how to love. The Prophet Lehi stated that “Men are that they might have joy.” Without love, life is devoid of joy and meaning. So deep mourning can be seen as evidence that we are learning one of the most important lessons of life: how to love.

The final truth that I would share with you today is that no matter how dark our days may seem, especially at the loss of a loved one, we can be confident that brighter days are ahead. Elder Wirthlin taught this truth when he described the experiences of the Savior. As I read his words, I invite you to compare his description of the experience of Christ with the life of Brother Means, and with your own lives and challenges. He said:

“I think of how dark that Friday was when Christ was lifted up on the cross. On that Friday the earth shook and grew dark. Frightful storms lashed at the earth. ...On that Friday the Apostles were devastated. Jesus, their Savior –the man who had walked on water and raised the dead – was Himself at the mercy of wicked men. They watched helplessly as He was overcome by His enemies. On that Friday the Savior of mankind was humiliated and bruised, abused and reviled. It was a Friday filled with devastating, consuming sorrow that gnawed at the souls of those who loved and honored the Son of God. I think that of all the days since the beginning of this world’s history, that Friday was the darkest. But the doom of that day did not endure. The despair did not linger because on Sunday, the resurrected Lord burst the bonds of death. He ascended from the grave and appeared gloriously triumphant as the Savior of all mankind. “

Elder Wirthlin continued: “Each of us will have our own Fridays –those days when the universe itself seems shattered and the shards of our world lie littered about us in pieces. We all will experience those broken times when it seems we can never be put together again. We will always have our Fridays. But I testify to you in the name of the One who conquered death – Sunday will come. In the darkest of our sorrow, Sunday will come. No matter our desperation, no matter our grief, Sunday will come. In this life or the next, Sunday will come.” -Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, Sunday Will Come, Oct. 2006

I testify that because of the gift of the Savior’s atonement and universal resurrection to all mankind, we will see Brother Means again in the flesh. Because of Christ, our Sunday will indeed come. I testify that because of eternal sealing covenants made in the House of the Lord, that Joan and Jerry will someday have a joyful reunion that will enable them to continue on in their loving relationship. I testify to you of the reality of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. His life is not a made up story. We have countless witnesses of His reality. As Elder Wirthlin testified:

“Thousands in the Old and New Worlds witnessed the risen Savior. They felt the wounds in His hands, feet, and side. ...Many of them offered as a final testimony their own precious lives. They died as martyrs, the testimony of the risen Christ on their lips as they perished. The Resurrection transformed the lives of those who witnessed it. Should it not transform ours?” -Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, Sunday Will Come, Oct. 2006

Many more in our day have similarly seen Him and testified of His reality. I promise you that as you consistently seek Him, He will also provide to you countless experiences that witness of His love and of His reality. I promise you that as you reach out your hand and put it in the outstretched hand of the Savior, the touch of the Master's hand will make all the difference.

I say these things in His sacred name, Jesus Christ. Amen