
“Things As They Really Are. . .”

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Brothers and sisters, my first, and perhaps my most important, statement to you tonight is one of appreciation. I am very conscious that I speak to a group of individuals who have done much to blend the truths of the gospel with their professional training, so that correct concepts and proper principles are employed in your professional efforts. Next, I want to thank you for enduring the travail that is often yours as you attempt to help others to better their lives whether in improved decision making concerning career choices, in saving or enriching a marriage or, in some cases, in moving people away from the edge of self-destruction. I salute you for those contributions and want you to know that you have my personal gratitude as you “succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees.” (D&C 81:5.)

Because you are who you are and because of your loyalty to the Kingdom, it is possible to talk to you about a few basic principles that bear upon your discipline as, indeed, upon each of our lives.

I need not inform you that one of the vital things which a healthy person does is to recognize reality and to cope with it. Unfortunately, in recent years the word “reality” has been appropriated in large measure by disbelievers. Further, “reality” has come to mean only the “here and now” things, when actually it includes ultimate as well as proximate reality. Since the well-being of any

human turns upon his or her understanding of, and acceptance of, and adjustment to reality, we as Latter-day Saints must recognize, more than we sometimes do, that we are in possession of some overarchingly important truths about ultimate reality.

I have taken as my text a statement by the poet-prophet, Jacob, in which he speaks of how the Spirit teaches us the truth of “things as they really are, and of things as they really will be” (Jacob 4: 13). So far as I know, this declaration is the only time in all of scripture where the adverb “really” is used: and herein it is used twice within one sentence for exceptional emphasis by Jacob.

In 33 A.D. when Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” no answer was given. But an answer was given in 1833 A.D. when the Savior told the Prophet Joseph Smith, “And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (Doctrine and Covenants 93: 24). That is the same consistent, basic message as in the text for this evening from Jacob about the reality of “things as they really are, and things as they really will be.” It is the same basic message given to us by Paul who noted that the Spirit of God searcheth “the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2: 10). The “deep things of God” give us deep and spanning knowledge which is emancipating and makes us intellectually free. Without the perspectives of the gospel, the universe becomes a prison or an unfathomable maze, causing some to act out through hedonism and others to sink into despair.

No therapy or counsel will be lastingly successful which does not turn upon the truth or which does not recognize reality and does not prepare people to deal with the implications of reality. It is vital for us all to recognize the existence of the central realities—the reality of the living God and His Son, Jesus Christ. No wonder George MacDonald said that while men are “always struggling to make our home in the world, we have not yet succeeded. We are not at home in it, because we are not at home with the Lord of the house, the father of the family, not one with our elder brother, who is his right hand” (*George MacDonald Anthology*).

We must also accept the supporting realities such as the living prophets and the living Church, and the living scriptures.

Likewise, so far as human behavior is concerned, it becomes exceedingly important for us to take account of the reality of the resurrection and the judgment, for these two realities are among the things that “really will be” in a coming day of unavoidable accountability for all mankind.

When we can read and accept the scriptures about that judgment day, then we have taken a major step forward in understanding the nature of this life. Alma said of the impending drama facing the unrepentant wicked:

For our words will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God: and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.

But this cannot be; we must come forth and stand before him in his glory, and in his power, and in his might, majesty, and dominion, and acknowledge to our everlasting shame that all his judgments are just; that he is just in all his works, and that he is merciful unto the children of men, and that he has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance (Alma 12: 14, 15).

By way of contrast, Enos wrote of how the righteous would stand before God and “see God’s face with pleasure.” (Enos 27.)

To nonbelievers, of course, the basic truths about reality are disregarded; some are, in fact, contemptuous of such ultimate realities. But these realities will not go away simply because we refuse to recognize them.

To appreciate even in part how incredibly important these absolute truths are, all one needs to do is to look at the personal and societal consequences of disbelieving in divine, unchanging standards, and, therefore, of a society which does not live by such standards. How can a society set serious priorities if there are no basic standards to guide by? Are we to make our calculations using only the arithmetic of appetite?

A society not based upon key values like loving our neighbor will inevitably subsidize selfishness; it will also place a premium

upon an apostate form of individualism at the expense of community. If we do not see ourselves as more than temporary, biological brothers, our behavior changes. When we repudiate our traditional relationships with God, it is so much easier to repudiate our relationships with man, to repudiate debt and relatives.

If self-interest were the final determinant, why should we be inconvenienced by the needs of others? If there were no God and we were merely mortal transients, then what is wrong with governments pushing us around? Indeed, what is really wrong about anything at all? Remember Korihor's culture in which "whatsoever a man did was no crime?" (Alma 30: 17).

Once society loses its capacity to declare that some things are wrong *per se*, then it finds itself forever building temporary defenses, revising rationales, drawing new lines—but forever falling back and losing its nerve. A society which permits anything will eventually lose everything! Liberated lemmings who continue the march to the sea may proudly think what they like, but soon the watery grave will envelop them.

Take away a consciousness of eternity and see how differently time is spent. Take away an acknowledgment of divine design in the structure of life and then watch the mindless scurrying to redesign human systems to make life pain-free and pleasure-filled. Take away regard for the divinity in one's neighbor, and watch the drop in our regard for his property. Take away basic moral standards and observe how quickly tolerance changes into permissiveness. Take away the sacred sense of belonging to a family or community, and observe how quickly citizens cease to care for big cities.

Our awareness of "things as they really are" must bear in upon proximate things like lifestyle. Take, for instance, the truth given to us by the Savior which says to us all—quite simply and straightforwardly—"he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10: 39). Personal development through unselfish service to others *for Christ's cause*—not just any cause—is a fundamental orientation to life; it sends us, as believers, in an entirely opposite

course from the paths taken by those for whom self-fulfillment is basically self-indulgence.

Therefore, when you and I counsel or teach people that they must reach outward and be interested in others, as well as in themselves, we should be encouraged in such efforts by knowing that this approach is grounded in the absolute truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ! Such an approach is not just another form of transitory therapy. We as Latter-day Saints, more than others, should be able to understand the terrible implications of the growing selfishness in the world and what it costs the individual as well as society.

Unselfishness, however, creates in us attitudinal space and frees our time and talent for noticing the needs of others. It even permits us to develop a proper sense of humor. President Kimball, for instance, is so unselfish and so unconcerned with his own needs that his quick mind sees mirth and incongruity in situations which a selfish person would not even see because of the latter's intense concern with himself. We see so much more when we look outward. G. K. Chesterton observed:

How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it; if you could really look at other men with common curiosity and pleasure. . . . You would begin to be interested in them, because they were not interested in you. You would break out of this tiny and tawdry theatre in which your own little plot is always being played, and you would find yourselves under a freer sky, in a street full of splendid strangers (*Orthodoxy*).

Unselfishness is closely tied to humility. It frees us and emancipates us in so many ways. For instance, in group situations the unselfish person is not caught up in conversational ping-pong and point-making but is tilted toward genuine listening.

If we could but get it through our heads and our hearts that God loves us perfectly, then we would have ultimate security and recognition and could ride out the proximate snubs and the mortal slights. Mortal peck orders are so transitory anyway—like the place among peers derived from the numbered plastic cards which determine when we will be waited upon in a store. If the person with the Number 1 card in the store assumed he had everlasting

preeminence over his peers even when he left that store, we would see him as vain and foolish! Think for a moment back to some episode in your life such as in elementary school days when someone crowded in ahead of you or stole some recognition that belonged to you. My, how maturity can squeeze such things into insignificance.

The unselfish person emerges as a relaxed, warm, open, secure individual who will go on contributing and serving with or without recognition. Indeed, the individual who seriously strives to keep the first and second great commandments will find the other commandments no great struggle. Sydney Harris, in contrasting winners and losers, noted a certain generosity of spirit: "A winner tries to judge his own acts by their consequences, and other people's acts by their intentions; a loser gives himself all the best of it by judging his own acts by their intentions, and the acts of others by their consequences."

Unselfishness makes room in our minds and hearts for appreciation of God, of life, of others, of nature. Unselfishness makes it possible for us, using Alma's phrase, "to give place" in our lives, so that we can experiment with the goodness in applying the principles of the gospel. Unselfishness is the only form of yielding which is also gaining. It is the only surrender which is also a victory. Because genuine unselfishness is so atypical, it will be inevitably misunderstood by some. Unselfishness then must be a tough virtue, or it will be abandoned because of the shame of the world. Only when we understand "things as they really are" will we become convinced that *me* is not the center of the universes; the gospel is a gospel of *we*.

In this celebration of selfishness, sex has become the secular religion. The secular religion uses the word *love* but not in a way that has anything to do with the first and second commandments or the other eight. Selfishness shouts, "Forget your parents if they slow down your pleasure-taking!" "Covet another's marriage partner and take that person if you can!" "Use the Sabbath Day for pleasure—besides you have worked hard and you deserve a little-relaxation!"

Selfishness is really self-destruction in slow motion; it is like taking a horse, lathered from a long ride, and letting him drink all the ice-cold water he wants—just because he wants to. Selfishness replaces empathy with self-pity; it is like complaining of one's sore finger while calling on someone who is dying of leukemia.

Each spasm of selfishness narrows one's universe that much more. Selfishness causes us to settle for so much less than that which we are capable of as it relentlessly shrinks our supply of self-esteem. C. S. Lewis once wrote:

We are halfhearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by an offer of a holiday at the sea. . . we are too easily pleased (*A Mind Awake*).

Selfishness, by shutting down our awareness of others, makes us more and more alone. As we are thrown back upon ourselves, there is the terror which comes with this isolation. In this, the solitary confinement of the soul, sensations are desperately sought for in order to reassure one that he is still alive and that he is a distinguishable part of the universe. The calisthenics of Christian service, however, are such that we not only increase our capacity but we feel better. It is like the sick Prophet Joseph Smith rising from his sickbed to go to bless others on a riverbank. He both healed and was healed.

Someone said that the only true slavery is service without love. True, but duty will often precede delight as we develop. As we practice our love, we increase our reach, finally touching those with whom we would not have previously bothered. Deep down, for instance, inside the grumpy and grumbler who are encrusted with selfishness is bruised love trying to come out. Buried inside the hypocrite are redeeming qualities which need recognition and encouragement. But those who have become hardened, tight knots of self-concern have to be reached and helped by unselfish souls who fortunately have not allowed themselves to be preoccupied with themselves. Thus the disciple must be different in order to make a difference in himself and in the lives of others. It is so vital that we let the light of the gospel shine through us. In one of His

marvelous prayers, Jesus said of Himself while speaking of his disciples, “Father, for their sakes do I sanctify myself” (John 17:19).

Only when we understand the reality of who we are and why we are here will we sense both our possibilities and our duties. Disciples especially must see others not only for what they now are but for what they have the power to become. When we take the first step in serving others without waiting for them to make the first move, we not only emancipate ourselves but others. It is all very much like a freed prisoner first unlocking the cells of others.

For me, at least, the Latter-day Saint psychiatrist, psychologist, and counselor is to play (as we all must do in different ways) a contributing role in helping others do that which Jesus said all of us should seek to do *first*. In Matthew 6:33 we read, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” In the inspired translation of the Bible, the Prophet Joseph Smith gave us some significant additions to that scripture. “*Wherefore, seek not the things of this world: but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you*” (Matthew 6:38). Notice that we are, brothers and sisters, to *seek not* the things of this world but to build up the kingdom of God and to establish His righteousness.

To do these things first is a challenge in a wayward world—even when we know what we do about the ultimate realities of “things as they really are and of things as they really will be.” Without the precious perspective of the gospel to follow, that taxing admonition of the Lord’s is exceedingly difficult. The deep problems individuals have can only be solved by learning about “the deep things of God,” by confronting the reality of “things as they really are and things as they really will be.” Hard though this process may be, painful though it may be, it is the one true course for human happiness here and everlasting joy in the world to come. Whatever we do in our individual lives and through the influence we have on the lives of others must move us and others to come to terms with these ultimate realities. To move in another direction is folly and misery.

Knowing some of the truths about things as they really were helps us to understand the present better. I cannot, for instance, ever see mortal power grabs without thinking of the drama in our earlier experience when Lucifer sought ascendancy at the cost of our agency. Likewise I cannot see selfishness in myself or others without thinking of Satan who is truly swollen selfishness—at the end of its journey. Moreover, when we try to impose our misery on others, I think of what a prophet said of Lucifer, “for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27) and “he sought also the misery of all mankind” (2 Nephi 2:18).

Because you believe in these ultimate things and apply them in appropriate ways to your efforts to help others, doing this will put you at variance with colleagues who have other value systems and other priorities. Latter-day Saint professionals in a variety of fields will come to know what it means to bear “the shame of the world” and yet to despise it. While we are given several scriptures concerning this irony of our interface with others, one will suffice: “Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world” (Jacob 1:8).

For us to endure, knowingly and deliberately, either the disapproval or even the contempt of others is a difficult thing indeed, but it is often necessary. In fact, it is imperative as a statement of what the Savior has told us about life. We simply cannot turn aside from these realities because of the peer pressures that may come in upon us. Revelations are not accommodations; they are directions. We may disregard them but we cannot amend them. We may fail to follow them, but we cannot erase them.

We do what we do not only for our own spiritual preservation but for the sake of others who have lost their way. Others must know that there is but one alternative to anarchy and chaos. Not several alternatives, just one. As custodians of those concepts, as keepers of those truths, we must therefore remember, as George MacDonald wisely said, “A candle is not lighted for itself, neither is a man.” The illuminated individual who really believes that the Light of Christ “lighteth every man” will go on trying—long after

other helping agents have surrendered to the darkness. His light may be a little one, but lights have a way of being seen, especially in the darkness.

Please deepen your personal scriptural scholarship, for in it will be truth, relevancy, renewal and reassurance. Remember that at the very center of the deepest doctrines are the pearls of greatest price! Remember that in the Inspired Translation of the Bible the Savior's phrase, "the key of knowledge," is defined as "the fulness of the scriptures."

God bless you with the increasing light of the gospel, for it is by that light that you and I will see everything else—"things as they really are and things as they really will be!"