

Principles of Sacrifice

ROBERT D. HALES

I would like to talk on the subject of sacrifice this evening. I shall talk a little bit about the sacrifice of Joseph Smith, about the sacrifice of Abraham and Isaac, about the Savior and the atoning sacrifice, but also I would like to talk this evening about the sacrifice of you and me and what the obligations are for us. To do this I would like first to review the fact that we are children of God and also to talk of the privilege we have of knowing an eternal plan of salvation that we in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believe in.

It is a thrill to know this important gospel truth—that we live; that we are in mortal state; that we have an opportunity to gain the riches of eternity, to live in immortality, and to have eternal life. The great truth is contained in the words of the song, “I Am a Child of God,” written by Sister Naomi Randall, with music by Sister Mildred Pettit. The fact that each one of us is a child of God is not known by everyone, but I think it very important that we discuss it before we talk of the atoning sacrifice. We can come to understand this and all principles of the gospel by studying the scriptures and listening to our prophets.

There was a council in heaven. In the Pearl of Great Price we learn that long before we came to this earth we lived as spirits, and as children of God we were with our Father in

heaven where a great council was held. We were told then that our Heavenly Father would make it possible for our spirits to come to earth to inhabit physical or mortal bodies. Here we would have experiences and temptations, but because he loves us so much he would make it possible for us to return to live with him again. All our Heavenly Father’s children were there, and we were so happy with our Father’s plan that we shouted for joy. However, we had to make a decision about which one of the Father’s children we should choose to follow to come to earth and carry out this plan.

Lucifer was one of Heavenly Father’s most brilliant spirits, a spirit son just like Jesus. Lucifer asked to be sent to earth, where he would force all of us to return to our Father’s presence without choosing for ourselves whether or not we wanted to do right. He would force us back to heaven. There would be no free agency. Lucifer was vain and very selfish, for he desired all the honor and glory for the success of our Heavenly Father’s plan.

Robert D. Hales was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 7 May 1978.

Because his plan was rejected, Lucifer became angry and rebellious. He and one-third of the spirit children who chose to follow him were cast out of heaven. Lucifer, whose name means *the shining one*, was told that he now would be known as Satan, or the devil.

Satan and his followers were permitted to come to earth to tempt us and to try to influence us into doing wrong, but none of them have mortal bodies. They are jealous of our mortal bodies and do everything in their power to keep us from returning to our Heavenly Father's presence. It has struck me as I have looked at Lucifer's plan in this day and age how much abortion carries that plan forward today. Every time there is an abortion someplace in the world there is yet another spirit child that cannot come to this mortal existence. To me it is yet an extension of Lucifer's plan and one that we should be mindful of when we come into discussions on this controversial subject.

Jesus, the eldest son of God the Father, offered to carry out the plan, used in many worlds before ours, that would allow us to have free agency. Free agency is that opportunity to choose for ourselves how we want to live. Because Jesus, our eldest brother, loves us so much, he wanted to take upon himself a mortal body like ours to show us the right way to live. And then he agreed to sacrifice his life so that in some heavenly way we could all be forgiven of our sins if we would repent of them and choose to live righteously while here.

It is important to understand that Jesus Christ had his free agency as to whether he would complete his act; and, as we know, in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed to his Father he asked that, if there was another way, this cup could pass from his lips. And when his Father told him no, that this was the eternal plan, Jesus then went forward and completed his mission. Jesus wisely knew that sometimes temptations would be appealing and that we would choose to do wrong. But

under his plan we could recognize our wrongdoings, repent, and be forgiven. To repent means to be truly sorry, to change or turn away from the wrongdoing, to seek forgiveness, and then to try with all our hearts to live better lives.

As spirits we realized the wonderful blessings of receiving physical bodies and of choosing for ourselves what to do. We also knew that each time we chose to do right we would grow in knowledge and develop in character, and that we would have leadership so that we could become perfect, even as our Heavenly Father. We then started on the road of eternal progression. The phrase "I am a child of God" and the beautiful thoughts contained therein are especially meaningful because we know that each one of us is a child of God. When we truly come to understand the words, that we are children of God, our testimonies grow. Then, hopefully, we become more determined to have the courage to say no when we are tempted to do wrong.

Our Father in Heaven loves us more deeply than we can understand. He had said that "he numbereth his people" and that each one of us is important to him (see Alma 26:37). He wants us to return to live with him and Jesus again. He wants us to communicate with him in prayer; to tell him of our love, of our devotion, and of our obedience; and to show our love by obeying him. It is interesting that in John 14:15 where he says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments," the great principle of love must include obedience. We show our love to our Heavenly Father by keeping his commandments, and through our obedience we can become more like him, developing those qualities of character that he wants his children to have, developing the characters that our earthly parents want their earthly children to have. "And he has sent me here, / Has given me an earthly home / With parents kind and dear" (*Sing With Me*, p. B-76). This earthly life is an important step in our progression where,

as brothers and sisters, we can know the joy of serving each other and preparing for eternal life together.

Adam and Eve were the first parents on earth. They used their free agency to decide what laws they would obey. They chose to become parents and to have children to come into their home—children who would be loved and taught the gospel. But even there, Adam and Eve had a son who turned away from the Lord: Cain. He was the first to be an example of those in the Bible that turned from the teachings of their parents.

Our memories of the preexistence, of living in heaven as spirit children, are forgotten; when we are born physically we cannot remember the great joys of living in the presence of our Heavenly Father. However, the Holy Ghost can bear witness to all that we are = truly spiritual children of God as well as earthly children of our fathers and mothers. It makes us happy and gives meaning to our lives to know who we are, what we should do, and where we are going. Heavenly Father planned for “kind and dear” earthly parents to be with us in heaven also, where we will live together as eternal families. Just as we should know and show our love for our Father in heaven by obeying his laws and commandments, we honor our earthly parents by loving and obeying them. They are to lead us, guide us, walk beside us, and help us find the way (see *Sing With Me*, p. B-76).

Our objective is to return to the presence of our Heavenly Father, to return with honor after leaving his presence. We must use our free agency in always choosing the right, and only through obedience to his commandments and through truly repenting if we do wrong will this be possible. By listening and accepting the advice and teachings of our parents and of our teachers in Primary and Sunday School, universities, and seminary and institute and of all those who love us, we can be led and guided to do right. Although it is not possible for them to

actually walk beside us, for them to actually be with us throughout all our lives, their spirit and memories can be with us that we might feel their love and prayers. Their only desire is for our happiness. They know through experience that this is not possible unless we live the commandments—unless we live righteously.

We can also receive from the Holy Ghost if we live worthy of the Spirit. Each week we partake of the sacrament to remind us of Jesus Christ and what he did for us. We are told that if we always remember him, if we will take his name upon us, if we will always keep his commandments, we are given the greatest blessing we can have in this life to lead us back into our Heavenly Father’s presence: we are promised that we will always have his Spirit to be with us. We can find that way back—we must, because that is why we came here. Therefore we must be able to be taught. “Teach me all that I must do / To live with him someday” (*Sing With Me*, p. B-76) is what we have to learn.

When we understand this phrase, it is helpful to know that several years ago, in 1957, before Spencer W. Kimball became President of the Church he was visiting a conference in California, and the Primary children sang the song, “I Am a Child of God.” Later he said to a visiting Primary board member, “I love the children’s song, but there’s one word that bothers me. Would Sister Randall mind if the word *know* were changed to *do*?” The change was made, for President Kimball had pointed out the very important truth that, while it is important to *know* what is right, it is more important to *do* what is right. Only in this way can we be sure of returning someday back into the presence of our Heavenly Father, to our heavenly home, to live always with our Father and his Son Jesus Christ and our loved ones. What joy comes when we understand the full meaning of being a child of God!

The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ is very important to us. Each one of us has to

understand that we are free from the bondage of Satan if we will seek freedom by being obedient. In the eternal plan of salvation, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the key which opens the door to eternal life, to those riches of eternity that are spoken of in the scriptures. The law of sacrifice is very important. It is exemplified, as we have just talked about, in the sacramental prayer. There we renew our covenants each Sunday; there we take upon us the name of Jesus Christ; there we say that we will always remember him and remember his atoning sacrifice.

I want to talk for a moment of this atoning sacrifice. Joseph Smith spoke of it this way in his sixth lecture on faith where he talked of sacrifice. First, he talked about seeking knowledge, for an actual knowledge given to any person that the course of life which he pursues is according to the will of God will be given to him by the Holy Ghost. Second, he said that it was through sacrifice, and only through this way, that God has ordained that men enjoy eternal life. And third, we know that through sacrifice, if all men's earthly doings are pleasing in the sight of God, all will be blessed.

Our sacrifices must be acceptable to the Lord as Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to the Lord. And today our sacrifices are numerous. We offer for a sacrifice unto him a broken heart and a contrite spirit. It is interesting that when Adam and Even were taught of the sacrament and of sacrifice it was a blood sacrifice, pointing forward and toward the day of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Then, after Jesus was resurrected, in 3 Nephi 9:17–20 he said, "In me is the law of Moses fulfilled" and then revealed the important truth that it was no longer necessary to have blood sacrifice, but rather to remember him and to keep his commandments and to take his name upon us. In the fifty-ninth section of the Doctrine and Covenants, verses 8 through 10, it clearly states that we "offer a sacrifice unto the Lord [our] God in righteousness, [again,] that of a broken heart and a contrite

spirit." And this we do on the Lord's day, and these sacraments are unto the Most High.

Do we understand, then, the law of sacrifice and its importance? Are we offering sacrifices of convenience at times and not doing what we need to do? Our spiritual covenants require sacrifice and full devotion to the Lord. On the Sabbath day when we go to the house of the Lord we should do so in reverence, for these offerings are a reminder to ourselves and to the Lord of our devotion. We shall be edified by having that spirit to be with us and we shall be able to touch the lives of others.

When Adam and Eve called upon the name of the Lord "they heard the voice of the Lord . . . speaking unto them, and they saw him not; for they were shut out from his presence." Next he gave unto them a commandment to worship the Lord their God and then gave them the law of sacrifice, that of "offer[ing] the firstlings of the flocks, for an offering unto the Lord." Sacrifice, to be successful, requires obedience. "Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord." And when the angel appeared to Adam, he asked, "Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord?"

Adam's reply, as we know: "I know not, save the Lord commanded me."

The angel then replied,

This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth.

Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.

[Moses 5:4–8]

Adam and Eve were also given the true order of prayer, to pray to our Father in heaven in the name of Jesus Christ, and this we were all to do forever. Then the blessings came as they were obedient.

With Abraham and Isaac I would like to break down the story into four basic principles:

first, the teaching principle; second, obedience to the law of sacrifice; third, the fact that in every test of sacrifice we must live it; and fourth, the fact that blessings flow. Let us first examine the teaching phase that Abraham went through. He had been taught the law of sacrifice and had obeyed it. But then he was called upon by the Lord. “Behold, here I am,” said Abraham, and he was told, “Take now thy son, . . . Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the Land of Moriah” (Genesis 22:1–2). Listen to that again: “Take . . . thy son, . . . whom thou lovest”—the dearest possession, as we know, that Abraham had. Abraham and Sarah had waited many years. Sarah at one point had laughed when the Lord had said she was going to be with child, and had been questioned, “Is there anything too hard for the Lord?” (See Genesis 18:10–15). And so came Isaac.

Abraham was told to go to a mountain, and he went. We know that he rose early in the morning. Now obedience sets in as the second great principle of the law of sacrifice. Two young men plus Isaac, Abraham’s son, also went to the mountain, and they cut wood. Isaac then went with his father, Abraham, with the wood and a torch, and they built an altar. Isaac was bound and placed upon the altar. At this point I sometimes wonder not only what was in Abraham’s mind but what Isaac was thinking of. Can you imagine looking around and asking your father, whom you love, where the sacrifice is, hearing your father reply that the Lord would provide, then finding yourself on the altar with your father’s hands raised, a torch in one and a knife in the other?

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

And he said, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know

that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. [see Genesis 22:3–12]

Is it not interesting that the purpose of all this was twofold? First, that Abraham would have the feelings of God the Father in the sacrificing of his son, that he would know the anguish; also, that through this the Lord might know that Abraham feared God.

Now the fourth principle, that of blessings from obedience to the law of sacrifice: Abraham lifted his eyes, saw the ram caught in the thicket, and offered it for a sacrifice; and then the Lord said, “Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: [I will always be with thee.]” He then went on to bless Abraham with multiplicity of his seed throughout all the earth, among other blessings, “because thou hast obeyed my voice” (see Genesis 22:13–18).

Let us understand sacrifice in today’s terms by what Joseph Fielding Smith said to a group of young people a few years ago. Joseph Fielding Smith, in talking to that group, spoke most impressively about his life and about his father, Joseph F. Smith, and then he spoke of Joseph F. Smith’s father Hyrum, who was his own grandfather. He spoke of the fact that we do not need to give our lives, but that our sacrifice and our lives are given to the Lord each day as we serve the Lord. There are many ways we do that; I have jotted down a few.

Every man’s faith is tested. He must develop self-denial either of moral or physical things of this world; he must sacrifice and show the Lord that he will give. These blessings then bring rewards and stronger faith. We do this “with an eye single to the glory of God,” as stated in the fourth section, fifth verse, of the Doctrine and Covenants—not for what we want to do, but rather for what the Lord wants us to do, when he wants us to do it, and in the way his work needs to be carried out. There will be times when we shall not

understand why. I sometimes think of Job as he was being tested, a perfect man who, in the twenty-first verse of that first chapter of Job exclaims, "Blessed be the name of the Lord," after his family has been wiped out. And then, in the next verse it is recorded that "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." How often, when we are tested or must sacrifice, do we charge God foolishly and ask the question, "Why me?" And then our sacrifice comes under question. Do we pay our tithes because we love the Lord? Do we live the Word of Wisdom for its spiritual blessings and not only its physical blessings? Are we truly morally clean? I shall be a mission president in England on July 1, and I would hope that I shall be able to return with honor, knowing that as I was in the field I worked with all of my heart, might, mind, and strength; for that is the sacrifice the Lord would ask of all of us. As parents do we make for our children the sacrifice of teaching them and living the commandments to be an example to them? Consider mothers, as Mother's Day approaches; they have a special sacrifice. They suffer, they love, they forgive; but most of all they teach us. There is a story I would like to give you as the background for a film we are going to see. I hope this will be a teaching moment for all of us.

"The Sacrifice" is produced by two young men who are returned missionaries, John Wadsworth and Tom Christensen. I would like you to watch for one or two things in this film; they are important. At the close of this film there is a father who has his duty, symbolic of God the Father, and a little boy who has been sent by his mother to tell the father that she is about to have a baby—to tell the father of new life. The father, who has the responsibility of correcting a drawbridge so that the train can come by, discovers a malfunction which keeps the bridge from closing; so he has to go down the gateway to hold the trestle manually with an iron rod for the train to pass. The little boy,

in all of his excitement, has forgotten how he should come to see the father and he runs up the tracks. In the closing moments of the film we shall see a railroad train full of passengers who are completely unaware of the drama as the father holds onto the iron rod, much as Lehi and Nephi were told to hold to the gospel of Jesus Christ; and he must hold onto it if he wants to save the people in the train, symbolic of the world, and so he must sacrifice his son.

The most interesting part of this film to me is the complete disinterest of the people in the train. I think our job, if I were to suggest one assignment from today's discussion, is that we go forth and tell the people of the world of the events this film symbolizes. You will see that even the message that the son is bearing is symbolic, being news of new life, and the great joy of a mother.

Once again, after Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden of Eden, they were given two commandments:

that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord.

And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou sacrifice? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me.

And then the angel spake saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth.

Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.

So it states in Moses, chapter five, verses five through eight.

The law of sacrifice is a temporal law. Man was instructed to obey it from the beginning of the earth. It was an ordinance performed by priesthood authority to typify the coming of the Son of God to give his life for the sins of the world. The law of sacrifice was practiced until

the coming of the Son. It was always performed in such a way as to give direct attention to the Lord Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice. The Feast of the Passover is but one example. The killing of the paschal lamb involved the spilling of its blood but no broken bones, as described in Exodus, chapter twelve. The offering of the sacrifice was a generally practiced ordinance of the gospel which ended with the sacrifice of Christ. The sacrament then became the newly established ordinance which served the purpose of the earlier ordinance symbolic of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

After the film I should like you to ponder just a few points. (We have arranged to do this in a way so that after I have closed with my testimony you will be able to ponder, and then we shall hear the song, "I Stand All Amazed.") Would you ask yourself this question: Could the people of the train have safely gotten across the deep chasm represented by the bridge without the sacrifice of the young boy by his father? When the people of the train are riding past, do they have any concern? You will see that they do not. Our job as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to take throughout the world the message that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that

through him all mankind is saved. In the words of Charles H. Gabriel:

*I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me,
Confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me;
I tremble to know that for me he was crucified,
That for me, a sinner, he suffered, he bled and
died. . . .*

*I marvel that he would descend from his throne
divine
To rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine;
That he should extend his great love unto such as I,
Sufficient to own, to redeem, and to justify. . . .*

*I think of his hands pierced and bleeding to pay the
debt!*

*Such mercy, such love, and devotion can I forget?
No, no, I will praise and adore at the mercy seat,
Until at the glorified throne I kneel at his feet.*

*Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me,
Enough to die for me!*

*Oh it is wonderful, wonderful to me! [Hymns,
no. 80]*

I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.