

Letting the Light of Christ Shine Through Us

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How does the month of January affect you? Gone are the carols, the wrapping paper, and the lights. Put away carefully are the wreaths, garlands, and bows. Out on the curb-side sits the dry tree, which has left a trail of pine needles down the driveway. Packed predictably on our hips and thighs are the holiday treats served lovingly by grandmas, neighbors, and friends.

Has your “one-horse open sleigh” turned into a pumpkin with the first stroke of January? Has your “Silent night . . . all is calm, all is bright,” gone to “study all night; what is wrong? I have no life?”

I would like to introduce my topic today with a bit of trivia. Did you know that the month of January was named after the Roman god Janus, who had two faces: one to look into the past and one to look into the future?

As we make our New Year’s resolutions, we do so like Janus with an eye on the future but also with a look back on past mistakes as well as past successes. It seems we must do this in order to put our lives into perspective and decide how we can improve and refine ourselves.

As we reflect on our past, get a grasp on the present, and look to the future, it is

important that we see clear images of where we have been, where we are now, and where we are going. Think how difficult that would be if the gospel of Jesus Christ were not a part of our lives. We would be able to see only the here and now, and our image of the present would be distorted by a lack of perspective. It is about seeing clear images with an eternal perspective that I would like to speak today.

When we see things up too close without looking at the entire picture, we lose perspective. Have you ever been to an art museum and viewed a painting from a few inches away, and then stepped back to see the grandeur of the artist’s intent? (I’ve always wondered how great artists could catch the vision of the finished product only a paintbrush away.)

Have you ever looked at your face so close in a mirror that a zit appeared to be the size of a strawberry? Not long ago, our youngest daughter, Christie, was getting ready for a party when I heard this horrible sound. It was somewhere between a scream and a groan. Fearing she had burned herself with the

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curling iron that had been left on for an hour (with five daughters, Rex has spent the past fifteen years running around our house unplugging curling irons—that’s how he trained for marathons), I rushed into her bathroom. There she sat on the counter with her feet in the sink and her face two inches away from the mirror.

“Gross,” she kept repeating. “Gross! I am so ugly, I can’t believe I would even go out of this house!” I stepped closer to see what was so gross, but it escaped me.

“Look at this,” she said, turning her face toward me. “Did you ever see anything so gross?”

“What? Where?” was my honest response. “You look wonderful to me!”

“Oh, you’re just saying that because you’re my mother. If you can’t see this red thing on my face then you are blind. It makes me look so ugly.”

As she turned into the light, I finally saw the object of her distress, but just barely. It was a tiny bit pink and vaguely visible. In no way did it render her whole person ugly. I stood there by her side, the two of us looking at her reflection in the mirror. She saw only one thing, yet I could see so much more. I saw a beautiful young girl and could envision her beyond the beginning of her teens and see what she would become. She could see only the moment of anguish. I could see the loving heart and caring spirit. She could see only the blemish, a magnification of what was wrong, and it became the whole of her. No amount of talking on my part could convince her that my image of her was the clear one.

I thought to myself, “How can she not see who she really is? How can she complain when she has been given so much? How can one little blemish diminish her image of herself? Why can’t she see the total picture of who she is and who she can be?”

And then I had a humbling thought. Aren’t we all at times a little like Christie? How often do we fail to see things in their eternal perspective?

How often do we let one flaw, one mistake, one bad grade, one disappointment, or even many disappointments loom so large before our eyes that we fail to see circumstances as they really are?

I can remember the first English paper I ever wrote when I was a freshman on this campus. It came back with red marks all over it—suggestions, corrections, sentences obliterated. I had thought I was a good student, that English was one of my best subjects, that I was a good writer. But, no! Now, because of one paper with a bunch of red marks on it, I saw myself as a failure.

Tears rolled down my cheeks as I walked across campus, and I questioned what I was doing here. Wasn’t I being just a little like Christie? Did my Father in Heaven think I was a failure because of one English paper? Of course not. But momentarily I lost my confidence, and with it my eternal perspective. I had lost my ability to be the person Heavenly Father saw in me. When we allow this to happen, the light of Christ that is in us dims. That light is a gift to each of us. We are born with it, and by our acts on earth that light either fades or brightens.

As we read in the Doctrine and Covenants, section 88, verse 11:

And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings.

Only through that light will we see clear reflections of who we and others are. Sometimes we are fooled by what the media would have us believe is perfection: gorgeous bodies, flawless skin, fashionable clothes. But this is not the way our Father in Heaven looks at us. We are told that “the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). He uses a measuring stick of

eternal perfection, where what really counts is how much we illuminate with the light of Christ.

Whenever I think of letting the light of Christ shine through us, I think of a rainbow or a prism that refracts light and displays many beautiful colors in the process. Even with the light of Christ in each of us, our lives will be as different as the colors in the rainbow. Remember, it is not possible for us in this earth life to be mirror images of Christ's perfection. However, what we can do is allow his light to shine through us just as light shines through the atmosphere creating a rainbow—a unique piece of beauty.

Despite what the world may tell us, this light—or this beauty—does not grow brighter with cosmetics or expensive clothes. Instead, it increases with Christlike acts and living gospel principles, whether it be taking an extra few minutes to help a friend, being kind to someone less fortunate, speaking a soft word to someone who is stressed or angry, or giving up something that we want in order to make someone else's day more joyful, comfortable, or happy.

Marion G. Romney once said, "When earth life is over and things appear in their true perspective, we shall more clearly see . . . that the fruits of the gospel are the only objectives worthy of life's full efforts" (*CR*, October 1949, p. 39).

We would all like to have the ability of the two-headed Roman God Janus to look forward and backward at the same time, letting our past experiences direct our future ones. The

best way—the only perfect way—this can be accomplished is by bringing the light of Christ into our lives. Only through the light of Christ that is in us and our understanding of the gospel can we see things in perspective—seeing as clearly as is possible in this life what is in the past and in the future.

I don't know about you, but I want to see everything. I wish I knew more and could understand all things. I am impatient, and I want to see everything clearly now. Even as a child I wondered what it would be like to see my Savior. I wondered if I would know him and if he would recognize me. My brothers and sisters, through the years I have come to understand that if we let his light shine in us, we will receive "his image in [our] countenances" (Alma 5:14), and he will know us, not by our outward appearance but by the light within. He will know us because our total beings will reflect his image. And we will know him because we recognize his light in us.

I know that our Redeemer is the light of the world and that his light dwells in each of us. I bear testimony that this is true. I want his image to be on my countenance. And when I look in my mirror of life, I want to see past the blemishes. I want his light to glow so deeply inside me that I will be able to see things, as completely as possible, with an eternal perspective. It is my prayer that we will nurture the God-given light that is in us. And when we feel its glow growing dim, we will reach out to others in Christlike ways reflecting his light and glory. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.