

The Atonement of Jesus Christ
Week Nine – November 8, 2023
The Garden Tomb
Notes and Quotes

Mark 16:11-14

**James E. Faust, "The Supernal Gift of the Atonement,"
General Conference, October 1988**

During the forty days that the Savior spent with the Apostles and others, they heard and saw many unspeakable things. This special ministry changed the Apostles from an uncertain, confused, divided, and weak group into powerful witnesses of the Lord. Mark records that the Savior upbraided the eleven "because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen." (Mark 16:14.) Perhaps the Apostles should not be unduly criticized for not believing that Jesus, having been crucified and buried in a tomb, had come back to earth as a glorified being. In all human experience, this had never happened before. It was completely unprecedented.... Said President David O. McKay of this experience: "The world would never have been stirred by men with such wavering, doubting, despairing minds as the apostles possessed on the day of the crucifixion. What was it that suddenly changed these disciples to confident, fearless, heroic preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ? It was the revelation that Christ had risen from the grave. His promises had been kept, his Messianic mission fulfilled. In the words of an eminent writer, 'The final and absolute seal of genuineness has been put on all his claims and the indelible stamp of divine authority upon all his teachings. The gloom of death had been banished by the glorious light of the presence of their Risen, Glorified Lord and Savior. On the evidence of these unprejudiced, unexpectant, incredulous witnesses, faith in the resurrection has its impregnable foundation.'" (*Treasures of Life, comp. Clare Middlemiss, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1962, pp. 15-16.*) Like the Apostles of old, this knowledge and belief should transform all of us to be confident, settled, unafraid, and at peace in our lives as followers of the divine Christ. It should help us carry all burdens, bear any sorrows, and also fully savor all joys and happiness that can be found in this life.... One can still go to the Garden of Gethsemane, but the Lord Jesus cannot be found there, nor is He in the Garden Tomb. He is not on the road to Emmaus, nor in Galilee, nor at Nazareth or Bethlehem. He must be found in one's heart.

Luke 24:13-34

Alonzo A. Hinckley, Conference Report, April 1917, 93-94.

I say, our mission is not only to proclaim, but to live as witnesses who have received the truth, and who love the truth. And if we live the truth, my brothers and sisters, no man can come within the circle of our influence without being impressed with the fact - somewhat after the same spirit as the disciples, when the Master met them on the way to Emmaus, and when they walked with him. The Scripture says, 'Their eyes were holden,' and when he came in and broke bread with them, then they beheld, and it was revealed unto them positively who it was. Then, in counseling with them, they said, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us?' So it will be with you, so it will be with me, so it will be with every man who, having received the light, walks in the light.

(Cf. Matt. 5:13-16; Alma 5:14; Alma 18:10-11; D&C 84:57-58)

Luke 24:32

**Dallin H. Oaks, "Teaching and Learning by the Spirit,"
Ensign, Mar. 1997, 13**

This (D&C 9:7-9) may be one of the most important and misunderstood teachings in all the Doctrine and Covenants. The teachings of the Spirit often come as feelings. That fact is of the utmost importance, yet some misunderstand what it means. I have met persons who told me they have never had a witness from the Holy Ghost because they have never felt their bosom "burn within" them. What does a "burning in the bosom" mean? Does it need to be a feeling of caloric heat, like the burning produced by combustion? If that is the meaning, I have never had a burning in the bosom. Surely, the word "burning" in this scripture signifies a feeling of comfort and serenity. That is the witness many receive. That is the way revelation works. Truly, the still, small voice is just that, "still" and "small." "The language of peace, as spoken by the Lord, embraces a sense of quiet confidence, comfort, and warmth. It is gentle and calm, amiable and sweet; it is temperate and kind; it is orderly and identified by happiness, joy, and feelings of love" (Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *The Holy Ghost* [1989], 14).

(Cf. D&C 9:7-9)

John 5:39

**Elder D. Todd Christofferson, "The Blessing of Scripture,"
General Conference, April 2010.**

"The central purpose of all scripture is to fill our souls with faith in God the Father and in His Son, Jesus Christ.... Faith comes by the witness of the Holy Spirit to our souls, Spirit to spirit, as we hear or read the word of God. And faith matures as we continue to feast upon the word"

**D. Todd Christofferson, "Becoming a Witness for Christ,"
Ensign, March 2008, 60.**

People should be able to see in us something of Jesus Christ. The way we act, speak, look, and even think will reflect Him and His ways.... Although we were not present with Him in His ministry, as we search the scriptures, we see Jesus and what he said and did. And as we emulate that pattern, we bear witness of Him.

(Cf. Alma 5:14; 3 Nephi 27:27)

Matthew 28:1-10

Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Sunday Will Come," *General Conference, October 2006*

I think of how dark that Friday was when Christ was lifted up on the cross. On that terrible Friday the earth shook and grew dark. Frightful storms lashed at the earth. Those evil men who sought His life rejoiced. Now that Jesus was no more, surely those who followed Him would disperse. On that day they stood triumphant.... 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. And in an instant the eyes that had been filled with ever-flowing tears dried. The lips that had whispered prayers of distress and grief now filled the air with wondrous praise, for Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God, stood before them as the firstfruits of the Resurrection, the proof that death is merely the beginning of a new and wondrous existence. 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 all have our Fridays. But I testify to you in the name of the One who conquered death—Sunday will come. In the darkness 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. I testify to you that the Resurrection is not a fable. We have the personal testimonies of those who saw Him. Thousands in the Old and New Worlds witnessed the risen Savior. They felt the wounds in His hands, feet, and side. They shed tears of unrestrained joy as they embraced Him. After the Resurrection, the disciples became renewed. They traveled throughout the world proclaiming the glorious news of the gospel.

Raised Up

Fallen, alone in our own private hell,
Feeling left forever there to dwell.
And when life's through and there is no spark,
We lie in the grave, left cold and dark.
But one Man, one Life, brings hope and light,
Endures the grief and conquers the night.
From the pit of spiritual death we climb,
through a quiet Garden and a prayer sublime.
And from death's grasp He sets us free
through a wooden cross on Calvary.
More glorious words were never spoken
Nor sounded forth to human ear.
The sorrow of the night is broken,
"He is risen, He is not here!"

Sunday Will Come

"My God My God" the Savior cried,
While guilty men his pain deride
They pierced his hands and feet and side,
When on the cross he bled and died.
The Light is gone, vision has fled
Jesus of Nazareth now lies dead
Why can't I recall the words he said;
I cannot see the path ahead.
In my heart for hope there is no room
As they lay him in the Garden Tomb
The air and my soul are filled with gloom
Surely this is creation's doom.
The night of darkness robs my peace
Heartache, anguish, despair increase
I plead to God for sweet release
And still my sorrow does not cease.
Friday's darkness seems to be
All that now is left for me.
How can I ever hope to see,
Aught but him upon the tree?

A night, a day, another night,
Then comes the dawn of Sunday's light.
And brings to all the heavenly sight –
The Savior stands in brilliant white.
Glad tidings doth the morning bring,
To all the world let music ring!
And with the angels let us sing –
He lives again our Heavenly King!

Luke 24:36-39

Joseph F. Smith, *Improvement Era*, June 1904, 623-24, *Gospel Doctrine*, 23, 447.

The elements which compose this temporal body will not perish, will not cease to exist, but in the day of the resurrection these elements will come together again, bone to bone, and flesh. The body will come forth as it is laid to rest, for there is no growth or development in the grave. As it is laid down, so will it arise, and changes to perfection will come by the law of restitution. But spirit will continue to expand and develop, and the body, after the resurrection will develop [to the full stature of man] We will see each other in the flesh, in the same tabernacles that we have here while in mortality. Our tabernacles will be brought forth as they are laid down, although there will be restoration effected; every organ, every limb that has been maimed, every deformity caused by accident or in any other way, will be restored and put right.... Those from whom we depart here, we will see as they are. We will meet the same identical being that we associated with here in the flesh—not some other soul, some other being, or the same being in some other form, but the same identity and the same form and likeness, the same person we knew and were associated with in our mortal existence, even to the wounds in the flesh. Not that that person will always be marred by scars, deformities, defects or infirmities, for these will be removed in their course, in their proper time, according to the merciful providence of God.

(Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:20-22; 2 Nephi 9:12-13; Alma 11:42-43; D&C 88:28)

John 21:3-18

**Jeffrey R. Holland, “The First Great Commandment,”
General Conference, October 2012.**

“What do we do now?” they turned for an answer to Peter, the senior Apostle. Here I ask your indulgence as I take some nonscriptural liberty in my portrayal of this exchange. In effect, Peter said to his associates: “Brethren, it has been a glorious three years. None of us could have imagined such a few short months ago the miracles we have seen and the divinity we have enjoyed. We have talked with, prayed with, and labored with the very Son of God Himself. We have walked with Him and wept with Him, and on the night of that horrible ending, no one wept more bitterly than I. But that is over. He has finished His work, and He has risen from the tomb. He has worked out His salvation and ours. So you ask, ‘What do we do now?’ I don’t know more to tell you than to return to your former life, rejoicing. I intend to ‘go a fishing.’” And at least six of the ten other remaining Apostles said in agreement, “We also go with thee.” John, who was one of them, writes, “They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately.... After a joyful reunion with the resurrected Jesus, Peter had an exchange with the Savior that I consider the crucial turning point of the apostolic ministry generally and certainly for Peter personally, moving this great rock of a man to a majestic life of devoted service and leadership.... Peter said for the third time, “Lord, ... thou knowest that I love thee.” To which Jesus responded (and here again I acknowledge my nonscriptural elaboration), perhaps saying something like: “Then Peter, why are you here? Why are we back on this same shore, by these same nets, having this same conversation? Wasn’t it obvious then and isn’t it obvious now that if I want fish, I can get fish? What I need, Peter, are disciples—and I need them forever. I need someone to feed my sheep and save my lambs. I need someone to preach my gospel and defend my faith. I need someone who loves me, truly, truly loves me, and loves what our Father in Heaven has commissioned me to do. Ours is not a feeble message. It is not a fleeting task. It is not hapless; it is not hopeless; it is not to be consigned to the ash heap of history. It is the work of Almighty God, and it is to change the world. So, Peter, for the second and presumably the last time, I am asking you to leave all this and to go teach and testify, labor and serve loyally until the day in which they will do to you exactly what they did to me.”

The Poetry of Peter

I left my nets to follow a carpenter from Galilee
Though years I’d spent in earnest toil fishing upon the sea.
I didn’t know or understand the change that would occur in me,
But something drew me close to Him when He said,
“Come, Follow Me!”
He worked all kinds of miracles; people came so that they could see,
He gave new sight unto the blind, but none more blind than me.
He fed more than 5,000 with some fishes and some bread.
But I tasted living manna, from the words that He had said.
Upon the sea one stormy night I started to walk to Him
But when the winds grew boisterous I feared and my faith grew dim.
I stood upon the holy mount and saw light fill His face
A cloud of light overshadowed me in that sacred, holy place.
Then I heard a voice from heaven declare Him to be God’s son
I feared until I felt the touch of Israel’s Holy One.
Endowed with power from on high I witnessed His Majesty
I received for myself a witness; a more sure word of prophesy.
I walked alongside the donkey as He entered the city gate
And the people shouted Hosanna! – not knowing His coming fate.
I sat with Him in the upper room to share the Passover feast
He bowed Himself to wash my feet, I felt among the least.
Then to the Garden I went with Him and tried to watch an hour,
But my flesh was weak, unlike His; I did not have His power.
But when they came to take Him, I defended Him with my sword,
He bade me not to fight for Him, and I sadly obeyed my Lord.
Later outside the trial, they asked if I knew Him too.
“No” came out before I could stop from denying what was true.
Shock and horror filled my heart when the cock’s crow reminded me.
He said that I would deny him thrice, and I wept – bitterly
My heart could scarcely take the strain when I saw Him on the cross,
I don’t think you can comprehend how I felt at that great loss.
I knew this had to happen to fulfill God’s holy plan,
But I had walked with God’s own son and not just a mortal man.
How could he have been put to death when others he did save?
Dead men he had caused to rise; now he was in the grave.
So when the women brought the news He was no longer in the tomb,
I could hardly bring myself to believe – but hope began to bloom.
I ran out to the sepulcher; the stone had been rolled away,
And all I found were burial clothes where his body used to lay.
Later in the evening, He came to where we met
I touched his hands and feet and side and once again I wept.
But this time not for sorrow, for joy had filled my breast.
I listened to him teach again, and felt my soul at rest.
Once more we tasted the manna as we met in Jerusalem,
But then it was back to Galilee and I began to fish again.
And while I was out a fishing as I had done for years before,
A man I did not recognize came calling from the shore.
My eyes were once more blinded by the work out on the sea,
But my Savior, Lord, and Master had said “Come, follow me!”
All my nets are empty now; at least of fishes from the sea,
For now I go out seeking sheep for the carpenter from Galilee.

Chapter 24

Atonement and “Alone-ment”

The day passed as we huddled together for some type of consolation. Watching as Jesus suffered on the cross was almost unbearable, but it seemed to be all that we could do. In the middle of the day, a darkness spread over the land that completely blocked the sun. It was as if all creation was mourning the death of God’s beloved Son, the very Creator himself. He had said at the feast that he was sent to be the light to the world, but now that light was being removed—overcome by the darkness of bitterness, anger, and hatred. I tried to recall the light that had come into my mind in hearing his statement about paradise, but it was as if the darkness was extinguishing any light or hope that I had felt. My head continued to tell me that this is what he prophesied and that it had to be, but that did not ease the ache and pain in my heart. I held my wife close as we both sobbed at the intense sorrow we felt. Storms began to rage as all creation joined in our sorrow and despair.

When all light seemed to have vanished and the darkness had become all-consuming, I heard the Savior cry with a loud voice, “My God, my God! Why hast thou forsaken me?” The pain and loneliness in his voice were heart-wrenching. I felt as if I could not breathe, as if all life had been swept from my soul. Surely, God, his Father, had not abandoned Jesus in his greatest moment of need! Why would he have left him alone to die? Could he not have sent his Spirit or angels to give him some comfort to endure the final agonies of death?

In all my contact with Jesus, I had never known him to be without the Spirit of his Father. I remembered his words to the disciples in the upper room that he was not alone because the Father was always with him.¹¹ Why had the Father left him alone in the greatest hour of his need? I thought back to the feeling of abandonment I felt when the sorrows of my first wife’s death left me without hope and without light. The darkness and loneliness had been overwhelming.

Then as if a ray of sunlight pierced through the darkness of the day, understanding came into my darkened mind. He had to know. Jesus had to know the utter aloneness that all of us would feel so that he could comprehend all things and be able to give us strength in the times when we would feel alone. Thus, through his atonement we would never experience an “alone-ment” as long as we remembered the cross and his suffering in order to know and experience all that we could experience in life. As he had ascended up on high, so he had to descend below all so that he might be in and through all things the light of truth. He alone could now shine a light into the darkest moments of our lives and help us see our way to be one with him and with the Father just as he had prayed with his apostles in the upper room of my father-in-law’s home. He was not only at one with the Father, but he was now at one with us in every possible way.

I was overwhelmed at the light that came into my mind, and while I was filled with joy in knowing that we would never have to be alone again, I wept at the price Jesus had to pay to become one with us so that he could make us

one with the Father. In that moment, the cross became a symbol of the price he paid to become one with us and the promise that we would never be alone unless we chose to ignore his sacrifice for us. *Alone* becomes *at-one* because of the cross which Christ endured.

Forgiveness, life, love, and loneliness—these were powerful lessons taught in a most unexpected way and in the most unlikely circumstance. Even in his final moments, Jesus was a teacher for all who would observe, ponder, and see by the Spirit of truth and light.

As these thoughts came peacefully into my mind, I saw a calmness and clarity come into the face of Jesus. He glanced upward and almost whispered, “Father, it is finished! Into thy hands I commend my spirit.”ⁱⁱⁱ With that he bowed his head, heaved one last sigh, and released his spirit from the agony of his pain-filled body. All in our little group began to cry once again, knowing that it was indeed finished. I again embraced my wife as we both shuddered under the agony of the moment.

His final words echoed in my mind. “Into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Again, amid the unconscionable, understanding came into my mind. Jesus was going home! His Father had not completely abandoned him. For those few brief moments, God had left Jesus alone to allow him to comprehend our feelings of loneliness, but now the Father stood ready to receive him into the mansions of which he had spoken while in the upper room. I could imagine in my mind the joy of that reunion as the Father of us all reached out to embrace his obedient Son.

While I pictured in my mind’s eye that moment of joyful reunion, the reality of what had just happened and the sobbing of all around me pulled me back to the present. Jesus’s body hung lifeless on the cross. He had gone to join his father, but what of us? His journey and mission seemed at an end, but what was ahead for those of us who had come to love and trust in him? Where were we to go? What were we to do?

“It is finished.” The finality of those words seemed as a reverberating echo in my mind, closing any door of hope or light that I had in my heart. The lessons that I had just learned seemed to vanish from my mind and my heart. I tried desperately to hold on to what I had just felt and learned, but I seemed to be sinking helplessly into the hopelessness that surrounded me. His life was ended. His story was now complete. With all the imaginings of my mind, I could not bring him back to life. The pain, the suffering, the agony—it truly was now finished.

The darkness of the moment enveloped me, and a sense of utter despair and emptiness seemed to seep into my heart. I tried desperately to hold on to some small measure of the hope and light that I had realized in the process of his sacrifice, but I was unable to see through the death of the man who had been my light for most of my life. All the memories of his miracles in my life slipped silently into the darkness of my despair. The lessons I had just learned seemed to be simple meanderings of my mind. Reality proved to be an overwhelming argument against the hope I had allowed into my heart and mind. All hope appeared to disappear as the distant mist of a morning meadow.

In my despair, my sorrow shifted. I no longer wept for Jesus, but I thought only of myself, my wife, and all those who had faithfully followed Jesus. I held my wife, grasping for any kind of hope or light to lift me from the depths of my

sorrow, but all seemed hopeless. John held Mary. All around us seemed lost and alone. Faith seemed to fade into the reality that Jesus was no longer with us. There would be no miraculous hand to reach into our souls and heal our broken hearts. The healer was taken from us, and we could not be consoled. The finality of that Friday seemed as dreadful as the darkness that had consumed the light of day.

Chapter 25

Light amidst the Darkness

The next moments were a blur. I remember the soldiers coming to break Jesus's legs to hasten his death, but when they found him already dead, they instead pierced his side with a sword. Nicodemus came a few moments later with another man I did not know, and they took the body of Jesus to a tomb. My wife and I watched as they sealed the tomb with a large stone. As the stone was rolled into place, I felt as if a part of my heart became sealed off from the light and love that I had known.

We slowly and somberly made our way back to the home of her parents. The emotions of the day had taken their toll upon us. The Sabbath was beginning, but we felt no desire to partake of the evening meal. As we sat recounting the events of the day to my wife's parents, I tried desperately to remember all the insights and flashes of light that I had experienced, but they all seemed to be swallowed up in the despair that now enveloped my heart. There was no peace, no understanding breaking through to give me hope or to bring light to my now darkened mind.

I grasped for anything upon which to rekindle my faith. Had he not said that he would give himself for a sacrifice? I had believed his teachings. I had received witnesses of his divine Sonship. Now all my feelings of faith seemed swallowed up in a sea of doubt. I was sinking into the waters of my own fears. Why could I not accept and believe him? Had I really known the truth? Was he truly the Messiah? Was he truly the Son of God?

Perhaps I had just been drawn in by his personality, his charisma, and his love. Perhaps all that I had felt and all that I had experienced were simply the imaginations of my mind and the naïve wishes of a heart hoping to be part of something miraculous. The more I reached for faith, the more I felt empty. Fear began to join with my doubt, and I found myself trembling at all that I had lost.

My wife came and sat by me and touched my arm. I looked up to meet her gaze. She must have seen the sadness I was feeling, yet I did not see in her eyes the despair and doubt that had gripped my own heart.

"We must continue to believe," she whispered.

"*In what?*" I almost shouted. "He is dead. In what are we to believe? God has abandoned us and left us utterly alone. There is no hope in Israel or a mystical Messiah. We are destined to be in bondage forever."

My words seemed to cut into the hopeful heart of my dear wife. "I know that this is hard to understand," she replied, "but I also know the healing that I received in a simple touch of this man's robes. I cannot deny what I know to

be true. I trust in the witnesses that have been born in my heart. Do you not remember all that we have seen and all that we have felt?"

She looked into my eyes as if hoping to see any sign of belief. I returned her gaze, hoping to remember, but I found myself too confused and exhausted to think clearly. She sensed my discouragement.

"Perhaps a night of rest and a peaceful Sabbath will help to restore some sense of hope to your heart," she offered. I agreed that we needed rest. We excused ourselves from her parents and retired for the evening.

Thankfully, my exhaustion overwhelmed me, and sleep came quickly and completely.

It was the middle of the morning when my wife finally awakened me with a gentle nudge.

"We are going to the synagogue to celebrate Shabbat," she said. "I was hoping that you might come with us to worship."

"Worship what?" I replied. "There is nothing to celebrate. All that we have believed, all that we have practiced—it is all meaningless. I believed Jesus to be the Messiah. I was certain of it. But now he is as lifeless as my hopes and my faith. I had hoped that the morning would bring light again to my mind, but I realize now that without him, there is no light."

"But there is light," my wife insisted. "The light of his teachings, the light of his love. Those are real and can remain with us forever if we will just give place in our hearts to believe him. He may not be among us, but we can keep his memory alive in our hearts by loving as he loved and living as he lived. Faith is not to understand and know all things but to live with hope for the future based upon the evidence of what we have seen in the past. Do not forget all that you have witnessed in your life just because we are temporarily in the darkness. Just as the sun arises each day to chase the darkness of the night, I feel certain that by living his teachings, his light will spring up in us anew and bring us joy and peace. But you must choose to remember your experiences and move forward with faith. Focus on your faith, not your doubts. Doubt your doubts, not your faith-filled experiences."

Her words rang with an echo of the things Jesus had taught me months before when I had allowed doubt to come into my mind. They seemed to penetrate the darkness I had allowed into my heart. As I reflected on that experience, other memories of things I had learned and experiences with Jesus began to flood my mind with light. Suddenly, I could see again. It was as if the light of his countenance was radiating to me through the light of my wife's faith and hope. I could see that if I was to have faith to overcome my doubt, I had to put into action the things he had taught.

Living water began to pour into my soul. I felt renewed and restored. She was right! The only way to keep the Savior alive in my life was to live what he taught. I did not need to have him constantly by my side to know the joy of living his teachings. His words had taught me how to live and to love. They had brought me peace. The kind of life that I was going to live was now up to me. Every time I had chosen to live his words, I had found peace, joy, and light. Whenever I allowed my doubts to darken my faith and did not live his teachings, I fell into despair and destructive

behavior. I now had to choose to live out his teachings with courage, even in what appeared to be the darkest of circumstances.

As my mind caught hold upon these thoughts, I could not help but think of Jesus standing calm and serene before the Sanhedrin. He did not allow their anger and hatred to penetrate his soul. I must not allow my own doubts to rob me of the light that I had experienced.

With a flash of understanding, the dreams of the night in Gethsemane came flooding into my mind. Jesus had overcome all the darkness that the world would know. He could give that strength to me. With these thoughts, the feeling of our embrace in the garden came rushing to my heart. It took my breath away. I began to weep uncontrollably.

My wife sat down on the bed next to me and held me close. She did not say anything, but she sat silently, holding me in an embrace that reminded me of that which I felt from the Savior. Her faith in Jesus had transformed her into a conduit of his love. I felt all fear and doubt depart as her love and tenderness filled my soul with love. I could feel that she not only believed in the teachings of Jesus as the Messiah, but she believed him too. She accepted fully his love for her and all of God's children. His love transformed her, and it was now reaching out to envelop me. I felt all doubt depart as I basked in the warmth of his love expressed through the embrace of my wife. In her embrace, we became united with the love of the Savior.

I realized in that moment that I did have much cause to worship and to celebrate. I had walked with the very Son of God and witnessed his love and mercy. I had been taught how to live and how to love. I felt as if I had been given the privilege of being on the top of a mountain, seeing life and living on a grander scale. I realized that while I was no longer on the mountaintop, I could live my life by the memory of what I had seen while I had been on the peak. This realization helped me to understand that every moment of life was not going to be filled with beautiful vistas, but all of life can be lived with the memory of the joy and beauty that one has witnessed. I wanted to now live my life by the memory of the joy I had experienced while living in the way that the Savior taught. He may have gone to heaven to be with his Father, but I could now work to make my own heaven on earth by living according to his teachings.

With this change of view and perspective on life, I joined my wife in honoring the Savior on this day of Sabbath, a day that God had provided in his goodness to remember his creation of this earth and his love and mercy in bringing our fathers out of the bondage of Egypt. I committed in my heart to also make the Sabbath a day for me to remember his Son and commit myself to live as he taught. I spent a good part of the day trying to write and remember all my experiences with Jesus as well as the lessons I had learned. This journal you are reading is a result of those efforts. It has served to help me put my experiences with Jesus into perspective and helped me to not only remember the light I have witnessed but to shine the light in my times of darkness as well.

ⁱ Matthew 27:46

ⁱⁱ See John 16:32

ⁱⁱⁱ These words are a combination of Luke 23:46 and John 19:30.

Chapter 27

The Road to Understanding

As I had suspected, Cleopas was already waiting for me when I arrived. He greeted me warmly and asked what had kept me. I told him of the experience I had just had with my wife.

“She really believes that Jesus is risen from the tomb and that she saw him?” he inquired.

“Yes, she does,” I replied. “But I saw him die on the cross. How could he yet be alive?” I said as we began our journey to Emmaus. “With all my heart, I would like to believe that he has overcome death itself, but how could that be? If he did have such power, why did he not step forward as the Messiah and free us all? Why leave us to continue to suffer at the hands of Roman injustices? Was this only to save himself and not us?”

As we discussed these confusing ideas, a stranger came and began walking alongside of us. We had not really noticed him at first, thinking that he was simply walking the same road that we traveled. He matched our pace for several steps and then asked, “What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?”

Cleopas responded, “Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?”

The stranger inquired, “What things?”

“Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,” we explained. “And the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death and have crucified him.”

“But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulcher, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.”

Then he spoke unto us, saying, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?”

Then, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he began to expound to us from the scriptures all things concerning Jesus.

As we walked and talked with this man, I marveled at his command of the scriptures. It was as if he was pouring light into my heart and mind. My heart burned within me as I felt the things he taught, every word testifying of Jesus. I looked closely at him and wondered why I had not seen him earlier among the disciples. As we drew nigh unto the village and the place where we were to stay, he acted as though he would continue farther on his journey.

I quickly entreated him, “Please, abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” To my great joy, he agreed to remain with us and share our evening meal.

As we sat down to eat, our new friend took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave some to each of us. As we ate the bread blessed by this stranger, all that Jesus had said and done while in the upper room seemed to come together in my heart and mind. In an instant my eyes were opened, and I knew him—Jesus! I gasped as my eyes began to swell with tears. I looked down to wipe my eyes, and suddenly, he disappeared from before us. Emotion overwhelmed me, and I began to sob.

I turned incredulously to Cleopus. He, too, was wiping tears from his eyes, marveling at what we had witnessed. We looked at each other in a state of disbelief. Then a confirming witness of peace came into my heart, and I knew!

“Did not our heart burn within us,” I said to Cleopus, “while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? Surely, we have been given a special witness and must share this with the apostles.”

Chapter 28

Sharing and Receiving the Greater Witness

Forgetting our business, we immediately returned to Jerusalem. We heard word that the apostles had gathered at the home of one of the disciples, so we made our way to tell them the good news. The day was far spent and night had fallen when we finally arrived back in Jerusalem. We found ten of the apostles gathered together, talking about the events of the last few days and wondering particularly at the words of the women who had testified that Jesus had risen. I approached Peter, who stood and embraced me. After a brief welcome, Peter could tell that I was excited about something. I did not know how to say what was in my heart. “Friend,” he said, “what is it? Is there something you want to tell us?”

“We have seen him,” I said boldly. “We have seen the Lord.”

We spent the next several minutes sharing with them what we had experienced, testifying that Jesus was indeed risen. While Peter nodded, seeming to acknowledge the truth of our words, others had doubts.

“I do not understand,” said Matthew. “If this was the Lord, why did you not recognize him when you first met? You walked and talked with him for hours, yet you did not know him? How can it be that you knew him not?”

“Perhaps it was an angelic messenger rather than the Lord himself,” offered James. “Certainly, an angel would be able to teach you the words of Jesus with such power that you might have been persuaded to think that it was the Lord?”

“It was the Lord!” I stated emphatically. “The Holy Spirit bore witness to our souls as he opened the scriptures to our understanding. We saw him bless and break the bread as he had done at other times, just as he did in the upper chamber of my in-laws’ home. I know with all my soul that it was him. My wife told me that she had seen him, but I doubted her just as you now doubt me. But there is no more doubt in my mind. All darkness of doubt has been swept away by the light of the Spirit that has touched my mind and heart. I do not know why we did not recognize him in the beginning. Perhaps our sorrows so consumed our hearts that we could not see with our spiritual eyes what was before us. But no longer. I have felt the joy of the Lord’s light and love and know that he is risen.” I could see that the boldness of my witness caused them to wonder, but many still did not believe.

Again, Peter approached me and put his hand upon my shoulder. “You have been one of the most faithful disciples since the beginning. The Spirit convinces me that you have spoken the truth. I do not doubt that you have seen the Lord. I do not know what we are to do now, but I am certain that the Lord’s work is not over and that we will be a part of whatever is to come. Thank you for your witness.”

“Thank you for believing me,” I replied.

As we spoke, the room began to fill with a light that enveloped our hearts with a sense of holiness. Suddenly, Jesus himself stood in the midst of us, speaking softly the words, “Peace be unto you.”

I could see in the eyes of many that they were terrified and afraid, not knowing what they were seeing. Jesus inquired, "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."

Jesus extended his hands and invited each to come and see. We saw the prints of the nails where he had been fastened to the cross. As I saw the marks of the nails graven upon his hands, the words he had spoken to me on the road to Jerusalem came flooding back into my mind. "Even in the times when thou dost forget, yet will I not forget thee. I will engraven thee upon the palms of my hands that thou mayest know my love and become all that I have shown unto thee."

A flood of understanding and emotion washed over me. He had suffered all this because he knew it was the only way to make it possible for me to become what he had seen in me! Then my vision expanded to see that he had done this for all mankind, not just me! He saw infinite potential in every one of his brothers and sisters upon this earth. They were not mere mortals but all possible gods and goddesses, each with unlimited and divine potential. He had taken the load or weight of the glory of all of us upon him, atoning for our sins and making right every injustice that would come in our lives.

My dreams of Gethsemane came clearly into my mind. I realized now that it had not been a dream. He had suffered as I had seen. He had taken all our burdens upon him, and now in a covenantal token of remembering each of us, he had allowed himself to be crucified, engraving forever upon himself the memory of the price that he paid to save and redeem every child of his Father in heaven. Truly, the worth of each soul was great in the sight of God and Jesus, his only begotten Son!

As I became overwhelmed at all the light flooding into my heart and mind, some of the apostles were still struggling to accept that this was truly Jesus resurrected from the tomb. Even with this sure witness, some felt as if this was a thing too good to be true, and they were blinded to the fact that this was truly Jesus in the flesh. While they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, "Have ye here any meat?" They quickly brought him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. He took it and ate it so that they could see that he was truly flesh and bone and not simply a spirit or apparition.

For a brief moment, Jesus paused and looked around the room at each of us. As Jesus's gaze fell upon me, my heart felt the peace and calm that had always accompanied his presence. He smiled and looked into my eyes. Once again, I felt his love and vision for who I was to become, now made fully possible because of his offering. I felt renewed and whole as never before in my life.

Jesus began to explain how all that had transpired had come together as it had been prophesied. "These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."

Then as he had done with me and Cleopus on the road to Emmaus, he taught us and opened our hearts so that we might understand the scriptures, saying, "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

At this saying, Jesus turned to Peter and explained that we were to go to all nations throughout the world to be his witnesses in all these things. He blessed and instructed us, "Ye are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endowed with power from on high."

Following these words, the light began to gather around Jesus until he became so luminescent that I could not see him for the brightness thereof. In an instant the light departed from the room, and Jesus was gone. Our time with him was brief, but it left a lasting impression upon every fiber of my soul.

No one spoke. All were overwhelmed at what had taken place. The room remained silent for several moments. Peter finally broke the silence. "Brethren," he said, "we have all been blessed this day so that we might be witnesses of his resurrection. Let us go to our homes, ponder on these things, and thank God for his divine Son and the glory of what we have witnessed."

We bid one another farewell and departed for the evening. As we left the room, Peter took my hand and thanked me for my witness. I assured him that I would be forever grateful to have been a part of such a sacred evening.

Though I had walked all day, I felt energy growing with every step toward home. I could not wait to share with my wife the events that had transpired. I was certain that she would be asleep, but I knew that I could not wait until the morning to share the news of what I had experienced.

Quietly ascending the stairs and approaching the door to our room, I heard her softly speaking to someone. I paused at the door to listen. She was praying ... for me! She was asking the Lord to share with me the witness of what she knew—that Jesus was alive and was risen from the tomb. I could hardly hold back the tears as I listened to her pray unto the Father on my behalf.

She paused in her pleadings, and I slowly entered the room. I quietly went over and knelt next to her by the bed, placing my arm around her. A bit surprised, she looked at me. Only a small lamp burned in the corner, but I could see that her eyes were wet with tears. She tenderly reached up to touch my face and then gently kissed my cheek. Still somewhat confused, she asked, "What are you doing here? I thought you were spending the night in Emmaus."

I shook my head. "I had intended to be there overnight, but something wonderful has happened that I had to share with you."

I told her of our walk with Jesus along the road to Emmaus and about not recognizing who he was until he blessed and broke the bread. Joy and gratitude swept over her face. She threw her arms about my neck and began to kiss me repeatedly. She had worried that I would allow my doubts to keep me from knowing and seeing what she had witnessed. "The Lord is gracious and has answered my prayers!" she whispered.

"That is not all," I replied. "Cleopas and I returned immediately to tell the apostles what we had seen. They were reluctant to believe us just as I had been hesitant when you shared your experience with me." At this, I squeezed her hand to let her know of my love and regret that I had not been more trusting of her testimony.

She smiled and returned my squeeze.

I continued, "After I had shared with them the certainty of our experience, the room began to fill with light. To my amazement, Jesus appeared. Some of the men were frightened and had a difficult time believing that it was the Lord, so he demonstrated that he was flesh and bones by having us touch him. He also ate some fish and honeycomb. But it was not until Jesus taught from the scriptures that they were able to finally comprehend that he was resurrected and standing before them in a physical body."

"You touched him?" she asked.

"As I am touching you now," I responded. "It was as if he had never died but had simply been away on a journey. He is risen just as you had said. I now know as you know, and we are to be witnesses to all of the world that he lives."

We sat in silence for a few moments. My mind began to reflect upon my experience on the way to Emmaus. I turned to my wife, asking quietly, "Why do you think that I did not recognize him when I first met him on the road to Emmaus?"

She became thoughtful for a few moments before answering. "You said that when he gave you of the bread, your eyes were opened and that your heart had burned within you while he taught you the scriptures. Perhaps we must first have faith and believe his words before we are able to see miracles."

She continued, "The truth is often given to us a little at a time until we are prepared and willing to accept it in our hearts. It seems that the bread and wine were reminders to your heart of what Jesus had taught about being the Bread of Life. Simple symbols often have hidden power to open our eyes and turn our hearts to God."

Then almost as an afterthought, she added, "I wonder if all the ordinances that our people have been observing for these thousands of years were all designed to show us the true nature of Jesus, but we as a people have been too focused on the symbols instead of what they symbolized?"

Her words sent light blazing with truth into every corner of my mind. "That is why he continually opened the scriptures," I cried. "He wanted us to believe what he said so that we could see him for who he truly is! Seeing is not believing, but believing is seeing!"

It all seemed so clear to me now. As Jews, we had trusted in the law and the scriptures as the way for us to return to God, but all scripture was written to bear record of him. He is the only way for us to return to God! But we had missed the mark and the meaning of the Messiah.

Suddenly, many of the ancient writings took on new meaning. My mind raced back to the beginning of the scriptures, allowing me to see Jesus in many things that I had not recognized before. The animal sacrificed to provide a coat of skins to cover Adam and Eve after they had tried to cover their nakedness with fig leaves became a symbol of the covering the Messiah would provide for us through his atoning sacrifice.

Abraham and his willingness to sacrifice Isaac was the story of God's willingness to sacrifice his Son for all of us. Isaac had been required to carry the wood just as Jesus had had to carry his cross. And while Isaac had been spared, there was no ram in the thicket this time to provide a substitute sacrifice for Jesus.

I thought about Joseph, who had been betrayed by his brothers, yet he became the very person who would provide a way of salvation for all Israel. And there was Moses, who had escaped the edict of death upon the children. This now seemed but a type and shadow of the infant Jesus who was spared from the edict of Herod. Moses had delivered Israel from Egypt just as we are delivered from our sins by Jesus, the true deliverer.

Of course, there was the Passover pointing to Jesus, but even more, the entire exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land became in my mind a journey that testified to me of our need for Jesus along our journey back to God. The parting of the Red Sea, the pillar of fire and cloud of smoke guiding them in their journey, the manna in the desert, the water from the rock—these all testified of Jesus as the way back to God.

I now understood why it was Joshua—the Hebrew name for Jesus—who led Israel into the Promised Land instead of Moses. This was to show us that it was not the law of Moses but Jesus, the true Messiah, that would take all mankind into God's presence.

So many examples flooded into my mind that my thoughts became a whirlwind of witnesses to Jesus and his role as the Savior—Abigail's offering to David, the temptation and fall of the kings of Israel, the cry of the psalmist about being forsaken, the story of Jonah. All of these and hundreds of others pointed unmistakably to Jesus!

The words of Jesus to the Pharisees resonated with truth. “Search these scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” I could not help but now see through the power of the Spirit that all things from the beginning had been given to testify of Jesus and his role to bring all of us to salvation.

Amid all the scriptures pressing themselves into my mind in just those few short moments, the story of Jonah continually returned to my thoughts. I hurriedly retrieved the scriptures that were on the table near our bed. I rifled through the scroll to find the passages of Jonah, excitedly sharing with my wife what I was witnessing. She joined in my excitement to have the scriptures opened to our understanding by the Spirit.

As we reviewed the story together, I realized that Jonah had been called to preach to a wicked nation just as Jesus had been sent to the unbelieving Jews. I pointed out to my wife the parallel between Jonah sleeping on the boat and the night that we had been on the Sea of Galilee and had been caught in a storm that we all feared would cast us into the sea. The Master had calmed the storm just as Jonah being cast over the side had calmed the seas. I had not realized at the time that Jesus would give his life to calm the storms in my life if I would but put my trust in him and obey his commands.

When we read of the weeds about Jonah’s head, I could not help but think of the crown of thorns that had been placed on the head of the Savior. In the darkness of his anguish, Jonah had called out to God just as I had heard Jesus call unto his Father about being forsaken. Jonah’s three days in the belly of the fish was a powerful parallel to the three days the Savior had spent in the tomb. Yet just as Jonah came forth, Christ also arose from death to go forth and preach again.

As all these truths from the story of Jonah sunk deep into my heart, I could not help but think that this was what the Savior meant when he told the Pharisees, “This is an evil generation: ye seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given, but the sign of Jonah the prophet.” Certainly, the sign of Jonah was enough to show any man that Jesus was sent to save all mankind by giving his life for us. Truly, the story of Jonah was the symbol of his death and resurrection in order to save us all.

My wife and I marveled at how clearly the scriptures testified of all that Jesus would do, and yet we had not seen. It was a fitting parallel to my experience in not recognizing the Savior on the road to Emmaus. It was not until he revealed himself to me—through the scriptures he had taught and the bread and wine he had blessed for me—that I was finally able to see him as the resurrected Lord. Truly reading the scriptures and the participating in the ordinances would never again be things that I did without seeing and acknowledging Jesus.

I invited my wife to pray as we knelt by our bed before retiring for the evening. She expressed the joy we felt in a way that left me forever grateful that we were companions. She was truly an angel sent to help me see, feel, and know God’s love. Together we had come to believe and finally see the ultimate manifestation of that love. Truly, God so loved all of us that he gave his only begotten Son so that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.