

# Easter Sacrament Meeting Address

Bruce T. Forbes, 2012

*The author relied on information gleaned from  
'Symbols of the Harvest: Old Testament Holy Days and the Lord's Ministry'  
by Lenet H. Read, published in the January 1975 ENSIGN Magazine<sup>1</sup>*

It's rare that a Holy Day of the Hebrew calendar and a Holy Day of the Christian calendar align themselves up on the same days of the week on which they originally occurred, but we have this happening this week!

If we were a congregation of good Jewish families, this past Friday eve we would have sat as families around our dining room tables with a special, once-a-year meal, and the youngest boy would have asked a question of the eldest man: "Why is tonight different from all other nights?", thus beginning the sacred Passover commemoration.

THURSDAY: But let's back up on more day. Thursday, the man of the house would have taken charge and would have ensured his family's home was cleansed of all unseemliness, filth, and corruption. Sure, the wife is probably the one who did all the work, but it was the man's responsibility to ensure it was accomplished.

Two-thousand years ago, on a similar Thursday Eve, Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples gathered in a room in Jerusalem, and together they ate their last meal together. He gave His last discourse to them, and, after singing a hymn, they left the room and went to the Garden of Gethsemane. There, in order to cleanse not only the House of Israel but the House of all Mankind of the sins, pains, and sorrows of Mortality, Jesus knelt and had laid upon him all these things to suffer the pain and punishment of them that all mankind might be made clean enough for the Angel of "Spiritual Death" to pass over and not tarry. By doing so, he thus satisfied the demands of the law of Justice through His act of Mercy.

We cannot imagine what Jesus went through. No matter what we have gone through in our lives, none of us have experienced this. Of this awful moment King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon taught:

And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus said in these latter days:

For behold, I, God [Christ is Jehovah; the God of the Old Testament], have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God [Jehovah], the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1975/01/symbols-of-the-harvest-old-testament-holy-days-and-the-lords-ministry>

<sup>2</sup> Mosiah 3:7

body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—  
Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.<sup>3</sup>

Why did the Atonement take place in a garden of olive trees? Olive oil has been used since the time of Adam to anoint for healing, to consecrate; to make holy. That which Jesus did among the Olive tress healed, consecrated, and made holy all men and women who seek to return to our Father in Heaven. His taking upon Himself our earthly, mortal burdens means we can repent, be healed, be made holy; be made perfect.

FRIDAY: Friday on that Passover Eve two-thousand years ago, each family's Passover sheep was sacrificed, and its blood was used to mark the doorposts and lintel of the house as a sign and token to the Angel of Death that this was a believing home.

At the very hour that the Passover Lamb in the temple was being sacrificed and presented to God, Jesus, having marked all mankind with the blood of His Atoning sacrifice, was hanging on the cross and uttered: "Father: into thy hands I commend my spirit," and then He died - the Great, Final Passover Lamb gave His life to mark all Mankind as members of His own household and thus protect them from the Angel of Death – If they would take upon them His name, remember Him, and keep His commandments.

SATURDAY: The House of Israel then rested on the Passover Day as it was a Sabbath.

SUNDAY: And then on the morning of first day of the week - that would be today the way the Hebrew and the Christian calendars have lined up for us this year – sunrise found the Priests in the temple busy fulfilling a command of the Lord:

When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.<sup>4</sup>

While a sheaf of the first harvesting of the winter wheat was being waved before the Lord in the temple at sunrise on the first day after the Passover, the true harvest of Mankind was just beginning in a quiet garden north of the temple. As Luke recorded -

NOW upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, [*and the Apostle Mark tells us it was at sunrise, making it the same time as the Priests waving the Firstfruits before the Lord in the temple!*] they came unto the sepulchre ... And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed... behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they [*the two shining men*] said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified,

<sup>3</sup> Doctrine & Covenants 19:16-20, notes added

<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 23:9-11

and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words . . .<sup>5</sup>

Jesus spent three years fulfilling the first part of his earthly mission, that of teaching His gospel and setting a visible example of how to live it. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He fulfilled the second part of His earthly mission, that of atoning for the sins, pains, and sorrows of all those who would follow Him.

Once He had taught and set an example, and once the Atonement had been accomplished so that Mankind could re-enter God's presence – only then could He fulfill the third part of His earthly mission - to open Heaven's gate for us to return to our Heavenly Father as purified, resurrected beings. In other words, to begin the Resurrection. As the “Firstfruits of them who slept”, He then began to lead all mankind away from the grave.

Jesus had to die so that He could begin the Resurrection. So, He allowed Himself to be put to death that we might live.

This salvation from physical death is a free gift to all mankind. Whether you believe in Jesus or not - from the vilest sinner to the greatest of Saints - all will be resurrected. It is a free gift given by Jesus. You cannot earn it, it is given to you whether you like it or not.

But salvation from spiritual death - from the separation between us and God because of our sins and assorted shortcomings; a salvation given to us through the suffering of the Atonement in the Garden - *that* we must earn, and I have mentioned how we earn it twice already, and the priesthood men who conducted the ordinance of the Sacrament in this meeting today have also mentioned how:

One, we must take upon us His name. Today we see people who wear shirts and hats and belt buckles with the names, pictures, and symbols of their favorite celebrity, politician, sports team, or cause. I myself have the Yellow M&M Guy on many of these things. When we are baptized, we symbolically write the name of Jesus on our baseball caps, t-shirts, key chains, and belt buckles. But far more importantly, we write it on our hearts and minds. We are His.

Secondly, we must remember Him. Whenever we have a choice to make, we ask ourselves: Is this something Jesus would do? Is this how Jesus would do it?

Third, we must keep His commandments. If we want to remain free of our burden of sin, then we are no longer free to do what we want - but we are freer than at any time in our life to do what He wants. And there is greater freedom in a life dedicated to obeying the Gospel than there will ever be in a life dedicated to doing what our mortal self wants to do.

But no matter how hard we try, we faulty mortals still make mistakes; still fail from perfection. If we have kept our eyes on Jesus and his gospel, then He, knowing our hearts and how hard we have tried, reaches out and bridges the gulf between our best efforts and His presence. He will not bridge the gulf between our best half-hearted efforts or our best barely-trying efforts; only our best efforts will do. As Nephi taught:

"For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 24:1-8

<sup>6</sup> 2 Nephi 25:23

On the Sabbath, we come to Sacrament Meeting to present ourselves before our Father in Heaven in a silent review between ourself and Him of how well we've done throughout the past week, and take the sacrament as a silent sign between Him and ourself that we are willing to continue trying for at least another week.

As we allow Jesus of Nazareth to take more and more of our burden upon Himself, He lays claim to us, and we are His servants - not *slaves*, but honored servants who are respected members of His household. The Apostle Paul tells us:

For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.<sup>7</sup>

As His servants we wait upon Him by doing His bidding, thus making the Atonement effective and alive in our life. The rewards of this are as the prophet Isaiah taught:

"Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."<sup>8</sup>

And as the Lord told Joseph Smith, 'And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them. Amen.'<sup>9</sup>

Now, just in case some of you are mystified that for the first time in memory I've given an entire talk without quoting a single hymn, I would like to share one through which we teach the children about God's love for us:

"How could the Father tell the world  
of love and tenderness?  
He sent his Son, a newborn babe,  
with peace and holiness.  
How could the Father show the world  
the pathway we should go?  
He sent his Son to walk with men  
on earth, that we may know.  
How could the Father tell the world  
of sacrifice, of death?  
He sent his Son to die for us

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:22-24

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 40:28-31

<sup>9</sup> Doctrine & Covenants 89:21

and rise with living breath.  
What does the Father ask of us?  
What do the scriptures say?  
Have faith, have hope, live like his Son,  
help others on their way.  
What does he ask? Live like his Son.”<sup>10</sup>

Brothers and Sisters, we need to live our lives so that we are living like Jesus, that our life might demonstrate what one ancient prophet proclaimed: 'And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Michael F. Moody, “He Sent His Son”, Children's Songbook (Salt Lake City: LDS Church, 1989) pg 34

<sup>11</sup> 2 Nephi 25:26

## Death Passes Over

Bruce T. Forbes, 2001

A father took a first-born lamb  
With no mark and with no blemish -  
With its blood he marked the doorposts  
And the lintels of his lodge.  
When Death's angel came for that fam'ly,  
It could not pass the lowly door -  
The lamb's blood marked that dwelling place  
A place so safe from Death.  
That night Death had to pass over.

A Father took a Firstborn Son  
Who had no sin to blemish Him -  
With His blood He marked the doorposts  
And the lintels of our hearts.  
Now when Death's angel comes for us  
It can not harm the lowly heart -  
The Lamb's blood marks this dwelling place  
A place so safe from Death.  
And Death will have to pass over.

Death's angel sends storms all through life  
To wash away the shielding blood -  
Vigilantly, we must renew  
The mark upon our hearts  
So no matter just how often  
Death's storms rage through our weary hearts  
The renewed mark of the Lamb's blood  
Will keep us safe from Death.  
And Death will have to pass over.

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