

# THE ATONEMENT



Steve Dunn Hanson

# The Atonement

*Remarks by Steve Dunn Hanson, Orange California Stake Conference, 1995*

To begin to understand the atonement on the most personal and real level, which is the only way we can understand it, we must understand the great dichotomy: On the one hand, our nothingness and on the other, our exalted nature.<sup>1</sup> How do we get from here to there?

We must understand the eternity of man—where we came from; why we are here, and where we are going. We are eternal beings and were with God the Father in the beginning.<sup>2</sup> We know that there are three separate kingdoms in the eternities: the celestial, the terrestrial, and the telestial. Since God the Father is only in a celestial state, that means that we were likely also in a celestial state before we came here, because we were with Him.<sup>3</sup>

It is God's will that we become like Him.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, there was a plan presented that would allow us to do this.<sup>5</sup> The plan *required a descending* to the lowest of God's kingdoms which we know is a telestial order and the world in which we now live:

- **To see** “if (we) will do all things whatsoever the Lord (our) God shall command (us).”<sup>6</sup> In essence, this "proving herewith" allowed us to manifest our godly desires even when we were surrounded by an “ungodly” environment. How could we become like God unless we could ultimately overcome all things? That is the definition of God. And it required us descending to the lowest of the kingdoms to take place.
- **To gain knowledge**, to “(know) good from evil” and, therefore, to be able to “act for (ourselves) and not to be acted upon.” In essence, to “become free forever.”<sup>7</sup> How could we discern between good and evil if we did not know evil? How could we ever choose if there was never a choice? How could we then be free “to act for ourselves” if we never had the knowledge to be able to

---

<sup>1</sup> See Moses 1:10 and Doctrine and Covenants 132:19-20

<sup>2</sup> See Doctrine and Covenants 93:21-23,29

<sup>3</sup> See Doctrine and Covenants 76:70, 92-96

<sup>4</sup> See Moses 1:39

<sup>5</sup> See Abraham 3. •22-27

<sup>6</sup> Abraham 3:25

<sup>7</sup> See 2 Nephi 2:26

do so?<sup>8</sup> Without this knowledge, we would always be “acted upon.” We could never be like God. All of this required that we be placed in a kingdom where all choices were available to us. In other words, the lowest of the kingdoms.

- **To receive** a body of flesh and bones to serve as a tabernacle for our spirit-bodies. God and Christ have bodies of flesh and bones.<sup>9</sup> So must we if we are to receive the fulness of joy that they have.<sup>10</sup> We don't know all of the reasons why, but pro-creation seems a logical one.<sup>11</sup> But to be able to receive bodies and to master them, that is to ultimately subject them to our wills, we must learn to control them in the most difficult circumstances which is to reside in them in the lowest of all of God's kingdoms.

The plan by necessity had to also provide the way to ascend back into the presence of God. What good would all of this knowledge, agency, righteous desire and body do us, if there was no way we could come back into God's celestial presence? And how could we possibly come back into His presence with a body made up of lower kingdom substance and a spirit covered from head to toe with telestial taint? For that, by definition, automatically occurred as we entered this telestial kingdom and partook of its offerings. Truly, we are as Moses said, “nothing.” and “no unclean thing” can abide in His presence.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, we were incapable of ourselves to do this. After all, for us to gain that kind of infinite power necessitated us coming to the telestial in the first place. We did not have it before we came, and we do not have it while we are here. Without outside help or grace we would be stranded in the lowest of kingdoms, eternally estranged from the presence of God and made subject to the lowest and vilest of beings in existence.<sup>13</sup>

Only one who Himself was a God could get us back into His presence. And this is what the atonement is all about. It is the way that we can come back to be at-one-ment with Him. The at-one-ment is not a single event, but incorporates the entire process, the plan, that allowed us to leave the presence of God in the first place, to descend to the lowest of His kingdoms, to experience what we needed to experience,

---

<sup>8</sup> See 2 Nephi 2:11-29; Moses 5:10-11

<sup>9</sup> See Doctrine and Covenants 130:22

<sup>10</sup> See Doctrine and Covenants 93:33-35

<sup>11</sup> See 2 Nephi 2:22-23; Moses 5:11

<sup>12</sup> See Moses 1:10; 6:57

<sup>13</sup> See 2 Nephi 9:7-13

and to then be brought back into His presence with all that was required in order for us to be like Him. That required God himself to condescend at every phase of the plan to reach down and *even come down* in order to lift us back.

What kind of pain and suffering did/does that involve? We can't even imagine. We concentrate on the Garden of Gethsemane and the crucifixion as depicting His ultimate suffering. But what about His coming to this telestial world in the first place? What could be more unimaginably painful than for God, Himself, to descend from His eternal heights where love, purity, and goodness exist in their fulness, to this place of hate, pollution, and wickedness? Or how can we comprehend fully the sorrow that He feels when those who He loves and has known for eternities estrange themselves from Him by their choices? Look at our own children. Imagine what it would be like to be separated from them for eternity. The truth is, His atonement, His infinite at-one-ment, requires the most indescribable sacrifice at every point.

The infinite love of God is the motivating factor behind the atonement. To potentially develop that love in our lives is the reason why we agreed to participate in the “plan” in the first place, and it is the end result of us allowing the atonement to work in our lives.<sup>14</sup>

Charity, or the pure love of Christ, means that one is willing to descend to the depths of sorrow to redeem/restore another. To, in essence, provide to another the grace (the way/the lifting hand) that would transport one of a higher nature back to his natural state. That process of grace requires a reaching down by the one extending the grace. And the reaching down almost always requires a payment of sorrow and pain. In other words, sacrifice. The degree to which we reach down determines the degree of our sorrow. The most intense love will motivate the possessor of that love to reach down into the deepest and broadest pit, to redeem/restore/lift one of his own. And thus it was with Christ. And thus it can be with us.<sup>15</sup>

Is the atonement working in my life? Do I consistently look at my experience on this earth as one of a celestial being who has traveled far from home to sojourn for a brief time in a strange and hostile land? Or do I all too often forget who I am and succumb to the telestial tugs that would keep me from returning to my home? Is my testimony of the Savior primarily verbal? Or is my life an irrefutable witness of His reality, of His sacrifice, and of His grace? The degree to which the atonement has effect in my life is

---

<sup>14</sup> . See 1 John 3:1-3; John 3:16-17; 1 Nephi 11:21-23; Moroni 7:46-48

<sup>15</sup> See Moroni 7:45-48

my choice.<sup>16</sup> The Savior's hand is reaching down to me, but in order for me to be lifted, I must reach up and take it.

At-one-ment means to become one with. That requires the willingness or desire on the part of all who would be one. That requires on my part, the willingness, even the desire, to take upon myself His name and lose myself in Him, that I might be one with Him. What would my life be like if Jesus Christ were the center of my thoughts? If I were to remember on a day-to-day basis that I am a son or daughter of God and could see what this telestial world really is? If my focus were on the Savior and on doing all that I have been sent to this lowest of God's kingdoms to do, how much effect would things like money, power, prestige, position, appearance, bodily appetites and passions, and all that is telestial have on me? And if my consuming desire was to be like the Savior and regain His presence, what kind of a light would I be to my family, to my friends and acquaintances? What kind of service would I render? What peace would fill my heart?

But it is so hard for me to do. How can I do it? Joseph Smith spoke about finding truth in contradictions or contraries. As we examine the apparent contradiction in Moses' description of man as being "nothing" and the Lord's description of our potential,<sup>17</sup> we are on our way to discovering the greatest truth of all: ***To know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.***<sup>18</sup> And with that knowledge we also come to know who we are, why we are here, and by and through and because of Christ's atonement, we realize our own divine destiny.

The most efficacious and meaningful aspect of Christ's at-one-ment for me is how it applies to me today. Right this minute. For how I get from Moses' Point A of *nothingness* to the Savior's Point B of being *everything* depends on what I choose to do *right now*. And *right now* is where I need His grace because I have found I cannot do it by myself. And the wonderful dichotomy is that it is this realization and the desire to seek the Savior that makes it possible.<sup>19</sup>

In a fitting close to the Book of Mormon, Moroni sums up the power and reality of the atonement.

---

<sup>16</sup> See Alma 42:27

<sup>17</sup> See Doctrine and Covenants 132:19-24

<sup>18</sup> See John 17:3; Doctrine and Covenants 132:24

<sup>19</sup> See Ether 12:27, 41

*32 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is His grace sufficient for you, that by His grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.*

*33 And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not His power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, **that ye become holy, without spot.**<sup>20</sup>*

---

<sup>20</sup> Moroni 10:32-33



# Impacting Atonement Scriptures

## **2 Nephi 2:27 (Lehi)**

27 Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil;

## **Ether 12:27**

27 And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

## **Omni 1:26**

26 And now, my beloved brethren, I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. ...Come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, ... and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved.

## **Doctrine & Covenants 82:8-9**

8 ... I give unto you a new commandment, that you may understand my will concerning you;

9 Or, in other words, I give unto you directions how you may act before me, that it may turn to you for your salvation.

## **Doctrine & Covenants 93:11-13**

11 And I, John, bear record that I beheld his glory, as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, even the Spirit of truth, which came and dwelt in the flesh, and dwelt among us.

12 And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace;

13 And ... continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness;

## **Doctrine & Covenants 109: 14-15**

**14-15** And do thou grant, Holy Father, that all those who shall worship in this house ... may grow up in thee, and receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost

## **Abraham 2:12**

**12** Now, after the Lord had withdrawn from speaking to me, and withdrawn his face from me, I said in my heart: Thy servant has sought thee earnestly; now I have found thee

## **Alma 26:22**

**22** Yea, he that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually without ceasing—unto such it is given to know the mysteries of God; yea, unto such it shall be given to reveal things which never have been revealed; yea, and it shall be given unto such to bring thousands of souls to repentance, even as it has been given unto us to bring these our brethren to repentance.

## **Helaman 14:15-19 (Samuel)**

**15** For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord.

**16** Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual.

**17** But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord.

**18** Yea, and it bringeth to pass the condition of repentance, that whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire; but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness.

**19** Therefore repent ye, repent ye, lest by knowing these things and not doing them ye shall suffer yourselves to come under condemnation, and ye are brought down unto this second death.

### **3 Nephi 28:10**

10 ...Ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one

### **4 Nephi 1:17**

17 There were no ... manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.

### **John 17:18-23**

18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

### **Doctrine & Covenants 84:19-20**

19 And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.

20 Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.

### **Moroni 7:47**

47 But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

### **Moses 1:39**

39 For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.

### **Doctrine & Covenants 88:34-35**

**34** And again, verily I say unto you, that which is governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same.

**35** That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but seeketh to become a law unto itself, ... cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, nor judgment. Therefore, they must remain filthy still.

### **Doctrine & Covenants 76:5-10; 114-119**

**5** For thus saith the Lord—I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end.

**6** Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory.

**7** And to them will I reveal all mysteries, yea, all the hidden mysteries of my kingdom from days of old, and for ages to come, will I make known unto them the good pleasure of my will concerning all things pertaining to my kingdom.

**8** Yea, even the wonders of eternity shall they know, and things to come will I show them, even the things of many generations.

**9** And their wisdom shall be great, and their understanding reach to heaven; and before them the wisdom of the wise shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent shall come to naught.

**10** For by my Spirit will I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will—yea, even those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of man.

**114** But great and marvelous are the works of the Lord, and the mysteries of his kingdom which he showed unto us, which surpass all understanding in glory, and in might, and in dominion;

**115** Which he commanded us we should not write while we were yet in the Spirit, and are not lawful for man to utter;

**116** Neither is man capable to make them known, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows on those who love him, and purify themselves before him;

**117** To whom he grants this privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves;

118 That through the power and manifestation of the Spirit, while in the flesh, they may be able to bear his presence in the world of glory.

119 And to God and the Lamb be glory, and honor, and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

### **Doctrine & Covenants 132:19-20, 24**

19 ... It shall be done unto them in all things ... in time, and through all eternity; ... as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

20 Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; .... Then shall they be gods, because they have all power...

23 ...If ye receive me in the world, then shall ye know me, and shall receive your exaltation; that where I am ye shall be also.

24 This is eternal lives—to know the only wise and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. I am he. ...

### **Mormon 7:10**

10 And ye will also know that ye are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; therefore ye are numbered among the people of the first covenant; and if it so be that ye believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost, following the example of our Savior, according to that which he hath commanded us, it shall be well with you in the day of judgment. Amen.

### **Abraham 3:24-25**

24 And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell;

25 And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them;

### **Mosiah 5:7-9; 12, 15**

7 And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.

**8** And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.

**9** And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ.

**12** I say unto you, I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts ... that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you.

**15** Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, ... that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all. Amen.

### **Helaman 5:12**

**12** And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; ... which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.

### **2 Nephi 31:20**

**20** Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

# THE LIVING CHRIST

## THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLES

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

As we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ two millennia ago, we offer our testimony of the reality of His matchless life and the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice. None other has had so profound an influence upon all who have lived and will yet live upon the earth.

He was the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Messiah of the New. Under the direction of His Father, He was the creator of the earth. "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). Though sinless, He was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. He "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38), yet was despised for it. His gospel was a message of peace and goodwill. He entreated all to follow His example. He walked the roads of Palestine, healing the sick, causing the blind to see, and raising the dead. He taught the truths of eternity, the reality of our premortal existence, the purpose of our life on earth, and the potential for the sons and daughters of God in the life to come.

He instituted the sacrament as a reminder of His great atoning sacrifice. He was arrested and condemned on spurious charges, convicted to satisfy a mob, and sentenced to die on Calvary's cross. He gave His life to atone for the sins of all mankind. His was a great vicarious gift in behalf of all who would ever live upon the earth.

We solemnly testify that His life, which is central to all human history, neither began in Bethlehem nor concluded on Calvary. He was the Firstborn of the Father, the Only Begotten Son in the flesh, the Redeemer of the world.

He rose from the grave to "become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20). As Risen Lord, He visited among those He had loved in life. He also ministered among His "other sheep" (John 10:16) in ancient America. In the modern world, He and His Father appeared to the boy Joseph Smith, ushering in the long-promised "dispensation of the fulness of times" (Ephesians 1:10).

Of the Living Christ, the Prophet Joseph wrote: "His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying:

"I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father" (D&C 110:3-4).

Of Him the Prophet also declared: "And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

"For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

"That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God" (D&C 76:22-24).

We declare in words of solemnity that His priesthood and His Church have been restored upon the earth—"built upon the foundation of . . . apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

We testify that He will someday return to earth. "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isaiah 40:5). He will rule as King of Kings and reign as Lord of Lords, and every knee shall bend and every tongue shall speak in worship before Him. Each of us will stand to be judged of Him according to our works and the desires of our hearts.

We bear testimony, as His duly ordained Apostles—that Jesus is the Living Christ, the immortal Son of God. He is the great King Immanuel, who stands today on the right hand of His Father. He is the light, the life, and the hope of the world. His way is the path that leads to happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come. God be thanked for the matchless gift of His divine Son.

### THE FIRST PRESIDENCY

*Joseph Smith*  
*Thomas M. Moore*  
*James H. Hunt*

January 1, 2000

### THE QUORUM OF THE TWELVE

*Boyd K. Packer*  
*L. Tom Perry*  
*Dwight H. Petersen*  
*Neal A. Maxwell*  
*Russell M. Nelson*  
*Dallin H. Oaks*

*M. Russell Ballard*  
*Joseph B. Wirthlin*  
*Richard G. Scott*  
*Robert D. Hales*  
*Jeffrey R. Holland*  
*Henry A. Eyring*

Oft I find my soul goes seeking  
For another time and place.  
Where the Light is always shining,  
Where I see the Savior's face.  
Oh, this world seems dark and gloomy,  
And I'm a stranger here!

Is there purpose to my journey  
Here on this unhappy sphere?  
Why would I consent to wander  
From a world where there's no fear,  
To a realm of hate and envy  
To be a stranger here?

Yet, in spite of all my sorrow—  
No! I think because it's there!  
I am learning to be purer.  
I am learning to prepare.  
Yes, this world has been my tutor,  
Though I'm a stranger here.

In my weakness I am finding  
Power in the Savior's grace.  
He has walked this road before me,  
So must I to see His face.  
And my journey takes me to Him,  
For I'm a stranger here.

*Steve Dunn Hanson*

## A STRANGER HERE

