

The Atonement NARRATION

To understand the atonement of Jesus Christ on the most personal, intimate level, which is the only way we really can understand it, we must recognize our dual nature. On the one hand, in Moses' words, we are nothing when left to ourselves. On the other, we are as God when we choose to become one with Him. But how do we get from where we are now to our potential exalted state?

We must remember our eternality. Our foreverness. We have always existed. And we need to understand where we came from, why we are here, and what takes place after we leave our mortal state.

We are spirit children of our Heavenly Father. Sons and daughters of the Divine. It is His "work and glory" to help us be one with Him and literally become as He is, if that is our choice. Therefore, in our premortal state, there was a plan presented that provided the way for us to do this. The plan required us to descend to the lowest of God's kingdoms, a telestial world, which defines our mortal state. This served three critical purposes.

- **First, for us to** "(know) good from evil" so we would have moral agency. With this knowledge of and experience with eternal opposites, we have the ability to choose to "act for (ourselves) or to be acted upon." And those choices define how free we will be eternally. How much like our Heavenly Father we will be. *(2 Nephi 2:26)*
- **Second, to determine** "if (we) will do all things whatsoever the Lord (our) God shall command (us)" when we, like Christ, leave Heavenly Father's presence. That is where we choose who and what we will be eternally. Whether to obey every transcendent law, some of them, or reject all of them.
- **And third, to receive** a body of flesh and bones which is an essential tabernacle for our spirits that enhances our eternal potential exponentially and infinitely. Heavenly Father and Christ have physical bodies *(Doctrine and Covenants 130:22)* And so must we to receive the fulness of joy that defines them, *(Doctrine and Covenants 93:33-35)* and like our Heavenly Father, have a "fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever." *(Doctrine & Covenants 132:19)*

The plan by necessity had to also provide the way for us to ascend back into the presence of God. Here in our mortal stay, we are immersed in less than celestial choices and experiences that are necessary for us to learn and choose who we want to be eternally. At times we will go contrary to the laws of God in that discovering process. But “no unclean thing can dwell with God.” (*1 Nephi 10:21*)

We are incapable by ourselves of attaining the purity necessary to enter back into the presence of Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. And without their grace to bring us back, we would be forever estranged from them. (*See 2 Nephi 9:7-13*).

Only Jesus Christ can do this for us. And this is what the atonement is all about. The at-one-ment. The way we become one with Him. The atonement 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, descend to the lowest of His kingdoms, experience what we needed to experience, and then be brought back into His presence with us having the physical body and the knowledge necessary for us to be like Him. If that is our choice.

Jesus Christ offered Himself as the infinite sacrifice needed to restore us, to bring us back. His great condescension, where He “descended below all things,” both provided the grace for us to be able to return and be like Him, and the example for us to follow to become as He is.

What does it mean to descend below all things? What was Christ’s great condescension?

Jesus Christ descended from His eternal heights where love, purity, goodness, light, and truth exist in their fulness, to this world of sickness, pain, hate, pollution, and wickedness.

He experienced the depths of sorrow as those who He loved and perhaps had known for eternities estranged themselves from Him. Rejected Him. And crucified Him.

He endured every emotional, physical, and mental hurt that man can inflict upon another or can experience here. Every grief, sorrow, or pain we will ever suffer, He suffered. Every challenge we will have as we look to change to become celestial, He has born for our sake.

So that He could have mercy, understanding, and be empowered to heal and lift and cleanse us. To take upon Himself all that keeps us from becoming like Him if we choose to lose ourselves in Him and do all that we do in His name.

He is our Savior. Not just to be adored, but to behold with utter astonishment and wonder and gratitude. His atonement is the ultimate expression of His infinite love for each of us. Our personal comprehension of what He has done, is measured by the extent to which we accept His Atonement as the defining aspect of our lives.

In a fitting close to the Book of Mormon, Moroni writes:

“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 ... sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ... that ye become holy, without spot.” (Moroni 10:32-33)

This is the atonement wrought by Jesus Christ for every daughter and son of God who chooses to follow Him. Because, He loves us.